University Of Alberta

Conflict Resolution For Peaceful Schools: The Implementation Of A Conflict Manager Program As Collaborative Action Research

BY

Carol Ann Kenway ©

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In

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ABSTRACT

Violence in the schools is a topic of wide concern. This study explores the development of a conflict manager program implemented in three elementary schools within a school district in B. C. as a pro-active response to that concern. The methodology chosen was *Collaborative Action Research*

The key issue explored in this study is the development of a collaboration / cooperation network. Collaboration implies that all parties work together as equal partners.

The conclusions of the study include the clear realization that the collaboration network became the foundation upon which the program's long term success depended. To the extent that measurement and triangulation were possible, it was also clear that the program achieved both a reduction in physical violence, and a change of attitudes towards conflict and its peaceful resolution. Sometimes these changes were profound, reaching out from the school to change attitudes and practices within the families of the participating students. The program continues to develop and expand extending within and beyond district boundaries.

In Dedication

to

my husband

Daniel J. Kenway

who has for me, made this work possible

as

critical friend

champion

and

loving soul-mate

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CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Increased concern and interest about the problem of youth violence

There is a global increase in concern and interest about the problem of youth violence and its impact on the school culture. This concern is expressed in the media, and is becoming the subject of a growing number of conferences. As a result of this concern, there is also a growing interest in research and studies on the topic of youth violence.

The widely reported incident in Sweden in which an eight year old child kicked a five year old to death, caused a media frenzy which carried shock waves across Europe and North America. Similar news stories in which children kill children have been reported in Scotland, the United States and Canada. Around the globe, satellites are beaming down children's programs such as *Power Rangers*. and *Ninja Turtles*. This combination of actual and virtual violence is a wake-up call for teachers, like myself, to become more concerned about the incidents we are witnessing on our own playgrounds. The karate style interaction of children has turned from worrisome to frightening.

Reports of bullying. extortion, slander, intimidation, stabbing , rape, death threats and even murder are examples of the physical, emotional and sexual abuse that have become more frequent in newspapers and other media in the

United States and Canada. A schoolyard stabbing reported in the *Edmonton Journal,* not only shocked the local community but was carried by media as far away as Japan. I have a file folder full of newspaper clippings that report on acts of youth violence which have occurred locally and around the globe.

A 1993 survey revealed that 93% of Canadian adults said that violence against staff and students in schools was of concern, and that violence was perceived as the most important issue among concerns about education (MacDougall, 1993). A survey of British Columbia secondary students also identified violence as one of the most common problems perceived in the public school system (BCTF, 1994).

The extent of the youth violence problem in Canada is reflected in the statistic that young offenders account for 35% of the case load before the criminal courts (Newark & Kessel, 1994). These high levels of youth violence are definitely reflected in the schools. A recent Canadian study conducted in Toronto found that 29% of grade 6-9 students had been threatened, 31% had been bullied, and 16% had been beaten-up while at school (Ryan et al., 1993).

Educators and other stakeholders come together to share information and ideas about youth violence.

Educators and other stakeholders in local, national and global communities. are coming together at conferences, symposiums, and meetings to share information and ideas about the causes of youth violence. In 1993, Alberta Education sponsored an invitational forum on student conduct and violence in the schools (Alberta Education, 1993). In that same year the Canadian

Teachers' Federation expressed their concern about increasing violence in the schools in their annual report (MacDougall, 1993). In 1994 a National Conference was convened in Toronto, on the subject of 'Violence in the Schools and the Street'.

A topic currently being explored in the literature and at conferences is the role of the school culture in developing conflict resolution skills in children as a response to the concern about violence (Steinberg, 1991; Lane & McWhirter, 1992; Willis, 1993).

The Interaction '96 Conference *Conflict Resolution: Transforming the Future* held in Edmonton provided an arena for stakeholders from all Canada and the United States to come together and make presentations on the broad topic of dispute resolution (DR) which includes all possible methods of resolving conflict, from concentual to adjudicative, from negotiation to litigation. Canada's Solicitor General supported the conference in its exploration of conflict resolution practices in violence prevention and resolution, including youth violence. Since the problems of violence in society are reflected by violence the schools, this conference was recognized by Alberta's Minister of Education as offering avenues for solutions.

> "Our education system is a reflection of the larger society and the conflicts, stress, and pressure that are being felt in the community are also being experienced in our schools. We need to learn new ways of resolving conflict and legitimate differences between stakeholders." (Jonson, 1996)

Locally within the ambit of school district #63 , the University of Victoria's Institute for Dispute Resolution serves as a focal point for conferences, symposiums, and training workshops. Sensitivity toward the issues of gender (*Mediation, Power, and Gender*, Whittington, 1992), culture (*Conflict Analysis & Resolution as Education: Culturally Sensitive Processes for Conflict Resolution*, Duryea & Robinson, 1994) and race (*Toward an Understanding of Aboriginal Peacemaking*, Price & Dunnigan, 1995) are reflected in the research interests and publications of the Institute, as well as in its local activities.

The Institute's local initiatives have resulted in global connections since the Institute has become involved in projects in Cambodia and Thailand sponsored by the International Ombudsman Institute and supported by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

These conferences and institutes are a few local examples of global responses to the perceived problem of youth violence and the role of the principles and practices of conflict resolution.

Increased concern and interest about the problem of youth violence at the site of this study

In Saanich, the residents of the seaside town of Sidney on Vancouver Island were shocked and horrified when the local media reported on an incident in which a local youth, out for a bike ride, was knocked from his bike, beaten and kicked to death while other youths looked on. This community, like so many others, demanded that something be done.

Saanich School District #63 had already been addressing concerns about violence within the school culture. The school district, with the support of the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation were in the process of implementing changes to the curriculum which included violence prevention resources and the development of conflict resolution skills.

Saanich School District #63 was also in the process of reviewing its policy on discipline. This was partly as a result of an incident involving a student with a weapon. As a result of this incident, the first of its kind in this school district, it was necessary for the district to develop policies on youth violence, weapons and intimidation in its schools.

A number of initiatives, from the district, from individual schools and from individual teachers were underway at the time of the incident cited above. The incident galvanized support for these initiatives and provided a climate which supported new initiatives. More importantly, since the incident happened outside the school, the problem of youth violence was viewed as a problem that had to be addressed by the whole community.

The District's Protocol Committee created a Violence Prevention Committee to focus on violence prevention programs within the context of safe and healthy schools. The new committee was mandated to solicit involvement from partner groups within the school culture to network with partner groups in the community such as police, social services and youth organizations. The committee was also mandated to increase the present

knowledge base by networking with other schools and communities.

A number of conferences, meetings and workshops on violence prevention topics such as bully-proofing, appropriate assertiveness, empathy and the win-win approach were being presented in the local community. An example of a challenging partnership was presented at the Focus 94 Conference in Victoria.

The Director of Youth Programs , British Columbia Ministry of Attorney General sponsored a conference, Achieving Violence - Free Schools, Effective Strategies for Developing and implementing Violence Prevention Initiatives.

It was in this climate of interest and concern that I began my involvement in the conflict manager program at Brentwood School.

The implementation of school based conflict manager programs has been rapidly growing in North America. The program that Brentwood School had chosen to follow was closely modeled on the strategies outlined in Davis, (Davis, et al., 1986). Essentially these strategies encourage students to use the Conflict Resolution Model. This model involves the student conflict managers getting the disputants to agree to accept help from the conflict managers. The conflict managers then facilitate a discussion between the disputants where both sides are heard, ultimately involving them in brainstorming potential solutions, and mutually agreeing to choose one and try it.

At Brentwood School, the purpose of the conflict manager program, called

the Ambassador program was to provide an arena in which to practice the conflict resolution skills they were learning in the classroom as well as to provide adult intervention modeling the same skills when needed. The purpose of conducting research on the program was to learn some lessons from implementing the conflict resolution model in elementary schools from my own experience as well as from the experience of other schools in Canada.

Furthermore, I considered action research to be especially relevant as it would enable my colleagues and me to conduct research as we were trying to implement the program and hence, improve our own practice in an on going process. Action research has been actively encouraged by our district through the establishment of Educator as Researcher projects as part of our professional development program. As a teacher participating directly in the research, I am able to improve my own theory and practice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Interest and concern about youth violence leads to growth in the fields of peace studies , peace research, and peace education worldwide.

The concept of violence

Some clues as to the roots of violent acts of students can be attributed to the social pathology of the communities in which the schools are located. (Menacker, Weldon & Hurwitz, 1994) The view that violence in the schools is a reflection of the violence in the families and the society acknowledges

that the impetus for violence stems from attitudes, beliefs, and conflicts that originate outside the school but erupt in that setting (Apple, 1979). In poor urban settings that are stressed by economic deprivation children witness and experience an onslaught of psychological, emotional and social assaults born of poverty, denigration, neglect, and lack of respect (Freire, 1972). In middle and upper-class settings, the absence of poverty does not insure an absence of assaults.

The common element is not poverty but an attitude. The attitude that violence is normal, that it is part of our human nature is a belief that is shared among all the classes.

> " Violence is normal in the world of today's youth...From Rambo to the corporate raiders, it's the aggressive, tough-minded guys who get the job done regardless of laws and the societal constraints... They 're the admirable, effective people" (Flax, 1993: 13)

In this construct, it is not within the power of the school personnel to control the cultural and social environment outside the school. Accordingly, Murdoch-Morris (Murdoch-Morris, 1993) and others have argued that the school must try to provide an environment where students have the right to be safe, not victimized, and not abused.

Accordingly it was not the intention of my collaborative research to explore the psycho-social causes of violence. It was my expectation that in the exploration of strategies for the containment of the outbreak of violence, that possible ways of transforming consciousness would evolve including

dissolving the very desire to deal with conflict violently.

In order to make schools safe, some schools implement "get-tough" measures: zero tolerance for rule infractions, police presence, surveillance systems, metal detectors and a clear disciplinary policy on the consequences for rule infractions. Perhaps this approach is reflective of a concept of violence that is too narrow and legalistic (Mawhinney, 1995), or of a failure to appreciate the pervasive influence of structural violence (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1990).

Non-violence: theory and practice

My personal experience as a teacher who has an interest in peace education has led me to study and reflect on the theory and practice of non-violence. Most of the writers I have read on the subject of non-violence refer to the Gandhian perspective or the historical actions of Mahatma Gandhi as an example of the practice of non-violence. The concept of nonviolence as the force of justice and the power of truth based on Gandhi's writings on nonviolent resistance as well as a testament to his actions is developed by a number of writers in the field of peace studies (Bondurant, 1971; Lanza del Vasto, 1974; Sharp, 1973; Boserup, 1981; Bose, 1987).

The influence of the Gandhian perspective is significant in the development of my conceptual framework. Gandhi was an activist and modeled his teachings. I find that in teaching non-violence through conflict resolution to children, I must facilitate a movement of power in order to empower them. In dealing with teacher-student conflicts it is mutual respect not power that is

the essential element in getting to a peaceful resolution.

> "From the Gandhian perspective then Satyagraha (action rooted deeply in truth) is a process of self-involvement and an endeavor for engagement with "the others". From the same perspective, nonviolence is a kind of bravery vastly different from violence" (Bose, 1987).

In practice, this can mean self-involvement through action research and through engagement with "the others" (the school culture, the family, the community). In this context, Satyagraha is engagement in direct action of a non-violent variety. It can mean developing an attitude toward non-violent actions in settling conflicts that is viewed as brave.

An example from my own experience: a child has badly hurt another child. In using the conflict resolution model, each child tells their own story. Child B's story is that child A hit him first and that his father told him not to be a 'wimp' (coward) and if someone hits him he is to hit back five times harder. The child is aware of the other choices he could have made but the desire to not be viewed as a 'wimp' in the eyes of his father took precedence.

The engagement of others took the form of a series of school based team meetings. Eventually, the participants included members from the school culture, the family and the community social services. The incident happened two years ago. The engagement of others was a long and complex process. As a result, the family is receiving help from social services in dealing with anger management. The child is now an Ambassador (conflict

manager) at the school. The father has expressed pride in his child's desire to help others solve conflicts peacefully. More importantly the family has experienced the bravery it took for the family to become a source of non-violence.

Beliefs about Violence

My thesis is based on the following beliefs about violence which I hold and which I support through observation and research and by confirmation through a variety of sources from the literature (Apple, 1982; Hicks, 1988; Gireaux, 1985; Freire, 1972; Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1990). These beliefs can be summarized by the following paradigm.

The expression of violence in the schools is, in part, a reflection of the violence experienced in families and in society (Freire, 1972; Apple, 1982). Violence is, also, structural. The structure of the school culture is based on authority. Intrinsic to authority, as expressed in the school culture, is power. The existence of a power structure provides a breeding ground for violence (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1990). Efforts to control violence through external disciplinary measures do not address the roots of violence (Hicks, 1988). Violence breeds violence (Bondurant, 1971).

These beliefs also form the basic assumptions on which the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) Task Force on Violence based it report on approaches to the concern of violence in the schools (BCTF, 1994). Since one of the principal foundations of my belief in collaborative action research is that successful change can only come about as the result of broadly based

collaborative efforts, I shall follow closely the concepts of the BCTF Task Force.

Defining Violence in the Context of the School Culture:

The working definition of violence adopted by the B.C.T.F. task force on violence in schools was:

> ". . .the threat or use of force that injures or intimidates a person (makes them feel afraid) or damages property" (BCTF, 1994).

The task force also found also found useful the more specific definition used by the Australian Teachers' Union:

> "Violence in schools is present in any situation where a member of the school community (teacher, student, other education worker, parent, or visitor) is intimidated, abused, threatened or assaulted or their property deliberately damaged by another member of that community or the public in circumstances arising out of their activities in a school" (BCTF, 1994).

The principles developed by the B.C.T.F. task force are:

> Violence is a continuum that includes such things as aggression, vandalism, verbal slurs and threats, as well as physical acts of violence such as assaults with weapons. We are as concerned about violence

and aggression among our youngest students as we are about youth violence in our older students.

Our preference is toward violence prevention. While we recognize the importance of strong interventions for dealing with violent incidents, we believe that a focus on violence prevention, particularly with young children, through a variety of means. holds greater promise for addressing the problem.

Schools are not isolated; they are part of the community and reflect the society around them. Although the task force is specifically concerned with violence in schools, we recognize that violence is not just a school problem, and that solutions, as well, will involve the broader community.

We describe violent acts of students as, gravely serious, and potentially serious. (Auty, 1990) The focus on violence prevention then would be on preventing potentially serious violence from becoming gravely serious.

Violence in schools is a reflection of violence in society.

If we accept that the potential for committing violent acts is part of our human nature, then the role of conflict resolution; that is solving conflicts in non-violent ways is a way in which we can prevent potentially serious violence from becoming gravely serious.

A look at some thoughts on violence from the literature

The assumption made by the B.C.T.F. task force on violence that:

> "If we accept that the potential for committing violent acts is part of our human nature, then the role of conflict resolution; that is solving conflicts in non-violent ways is a way in which we can prevent potentially serious violence from becoming gravely serious"
> (BCTF, 1994)

is an echo of thinking widely represented in the literature of peace education.

Needleman and Krishnamurti discuss the relationship between the violent part of human nature and the necessity to learn non-violent techniques like conflict resolution in their celebrated dialog (Needleman and Krishnamurti, 1985).

In his book, *Education and the Significance of Life* (Krishnamurti, 1981), Krishnamurti speaks of education and world peace. This is of interest to a teacher-educator who wants the kind of education that will foster peace. "Peace is not simply the absence of violence. Peace is often symbolically connected with love " (Krishnamurti , 1981). Needleman also talks of love as the "force of eros" (Needleman, 1986). Love when viewed as a force, then has power.

That the present world crisis is the result of wrong values in determining our relationship to others and to property, is a view expressed by many peace educators (Krishnamurti , 1981; Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1990). They see a relationship between education that values competition in preparing

students to be contributors to economic development and the present world crisis. They also see a focus on economic development leading to consumerism which they see as fostering an unhealthy relationship to property (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1990). Competition promotes win-lose solutions that are inconsistent with the conflict resolution model (Fisher & Ury, 1990; Kohn, 1986).

Following this general line of thinking, I contend that a conflict manager program must be supported in an environment of cooperation and collaboration.

The principles underlying the implementation of peace education have been succinctly summarized by Toh and Floresca-Cawagas (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas , 1990: 225):

> "Institutions that are committed to transformation must provide a peace-oriented curriculum where learning experiences lead to adequate knowledge and critical understanding of concepts, theories, assumptions, and the development of useful and appropriate skills steeped in values of empathy, sharing, justice, and compassion."

It was in the context of this philosophical framework that I set out to initiate my action research on the implementation of a conflict manager program.

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Personal Perspective

I am a teacher with over twenty years of experience. I have taught at all levels from kindergarten to university. My teaching experience has encompassed four continents.

I came to teaching as a calling. During my journey, I experienced the power of love from caring teachers. Caring, love and mutual respect were some of the substance that formed this peace educator.

I met John F. Kennedy (then a congressman) while I was a student at a women's Catholic college near Boston. I was later inspired by his message. "..ask not what your country can do for you but rather, what you can do for your country". I joined the Peace Corps. During my experience as a 'Peacenik', I became an anti-war advocate. I became involved in actions against racism and sexism. I became involved in environmental projects. These are all experiences that supported my development as a peace educator.

As part of this development I believe education should be human, collaborative, involve dialogs between stakeholders. I am in agreement with the idea that:

> "It is unlikely that one side is simply right and the other wrong. Undoubtedly both have intermixed some truth and considerable confusion over the proper conception of 'education' and 'humanness'. " (Walker, 1992: 9)

My experience in collaboration has been minimal and fairly recent. After entering into collaborative relationships with other teachers, the concept of entering into collaborative relationships with students, parents, administrators and other parties was new and exciting to me.

A barrier to collaboration is that it takes much time and commitment. It is necessary to break down the hierarchical structure. The difficulty in establishing, maintaining and expanding a collaboration network was in sustaining commitment, and finding time to collaborate.

In this paper, I contend that a conflict manager program must be supported in an environment of cooperation and collaboration. Working together, we can support a harmonious environment in which conflicts are resolved in non-violent ways; an environment that is conducive to learning and growing.

As I shall describe, the development of the topic as well as the progress of the research, was an iterative process.

In finding a starting point I began a research diary. I found a research diary useful in finding a starting point, and as a tool in the action research process . In trying to answer the question of how I came to focus on the problem of violence in the schools I have found it useful to reflect on my own story. Holly, a fellow teacher from New Hampshire presents a similar point of view:

"Keeping a journal can facilitate observation, documentation, and reflection on current and past experiences, including one's life history and the social historical and educational conditions that usher in the present " (Gillis, 1989: xi).

"Autobiographies can aid in reconstructing knowing, and understanding praxis." (Witherell & Noddings, 1991)

"Diaries can contain data as a participant observer...written reflections on research methods . In addition ideas and insights are noted that can lead to the development of the theoretical constructs which in turn can be used to interpret the data." (Altrichter et al., 1993: 12)

I initiated my journal as part of my exploration of Action Research. The idea of being able to effect positive change during the course of my research (an idea clearly expounded in (Elliot, 1991) and (Kemmis et. al., 1988) appealed to me very much.

Following my course studies in peace education, *Violence in the Schools* was the topic I chose to investigate. More specifically, I chose to focus on the implementation of a conflict manager program at a B. C. elementary school (where I work as a teacher) as a way of responding to the concern of violence in schools. The program (called the "Ambassador Program" at Brentwood Elementary School on Vancouver Island) is a conflict manager program based on the conflict management model (Palomares & Logan, 1975; Kreidler, 1984; Schmidt & Friedman, 1988; Davis, et al., 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Lane & McWhirter, 1992). Besides being of personal interest, this topic was of

particular interest to the school where efforts had already been made to implement the Ambassador Program.

The purpose of this research was to respond to the question of how schools can respond to society's concern about youth violence as expressed in schools.

Very early in my action research, my research question was:
How can violence in the schools be addressed through the implementation of a conflict manager program?

After initiating my action research and receiving cooperative and collaborative support from a variety of stakeholders, the question became:
How can a conflict manager program be implemented as a collaborative effort?

This question immediately gave rise to many other research questions:
How is a collaborative network established ? What are the skills that are needed for collaboration and how can they be developed? Since collaboration requires a commitment of time and effort , how can collaborators find time and maintain effort to do their work? How can the hierarchical structure be broken down to involve stakeholders as equal partners? How can the network be maintained and expanded? What specifics make a conflict manager program work? What skills need to be developed to insure the program and the network will continue to grow? Do conflict manager programs make a difference in providing for more peaceful schools?

In the course of this thesis I will describe the methodology, and report on the early results of this action research program.

In the course of this research it has become clear that work was and is significant on several levels. It was immediately obvious that this work directly addressed district concerns about youth violence and its effects on the schools. It quickly became obvious from both the literature (Auty, 1993; Mathews; 1994; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994; BCTF, 1994) and the developing collaborative relationships that there was a high degree of interest on the school, district, (and ultimately) provincial and national levels. The thrust of the research went beyond the implementation of the conflict manager program, and extended to the development of the collaborative network involving all stakeholders including the students. It appears that the development and maintenance of the collaborative network may be the single most important element in insuring the success of the program. This result has direct bearing on the theory of action research. The importance of making teachers' knowledge public has been clearly presented (Altrichter et al., 1993). However, the importance of collaborative networks in making action research programs succeed is an area with fewer results to report.

This project to some extent synthesizes the collaborative concepts of peace education (Freire, 1972; Toh, 1991; Toh & Cawagas, 1992; Carson, 1992) with the ideas of collaborative action research (Carson & Sumara, 1992; Carson 1994). In practice all the participants are learning (through self directed inquiry) the values, practices, and processes of conflict resolution, and it appears that the program is not only enduring but expanding to other districts and provinces.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

Action research by its very nature is directed by, and for the benefit of, the participants. As such it has been used in diverse settings to implement social change (Lewin, 1946), improve industrial productivity (Higgin & Jessop, 1963) and most widely to improve curriculum and praxis in educational settings.

Following the publication of the 20 case studies of the TIQL project (Elliot & Ebbutt, 1986) the validity and effectiveness of action research have been widely recognized globally by educators (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Altrichter et. al., 1993).

Practical recognition of the effectiveness of action research has been reflected in the growing number of committees, programs and projects implementing action research. For example, in 1993 School District #63 (Saanich, B. C.) established the Educator as Researcher Committee as part of their professional development program.

The action research approach is very popular for several good reasons. The most obvious is that the participants are the beneficiaries. This tends to result in greater commitment to implementing the results, and greater longevity of positive change. Since the research itself is conducted by the participants, the

positive change is almost immediate.

The action research model is easily contrasted with more traditional research models where an outside 'objective' researcher will carefully test hypotheses on small experimental and control groups, then report on the results. Although there is no question the traditional method produces good 'scientific' results, there have been frequent questions about the relevance of the topics researched, and the lack of support among practitioners in utilizing the findings.

> "A cornerstone of the action research movement is its criticism of traditional research for trying to initiate change through the dissemination of research results, rather than through the involvement of more people in the process of research" (Shumsky, 1956).

Although collaboration (in the sense of breaking down hierarchical structures so that all participants can work together as equals) would appear to be implicit in Lewin's original concepts, the historical refinement of action research has not consistently led in this direction. "The name 'action research' has been applied to questions ranging from individual teachers trying to solve very specific classroom management problems (Hustler, Cassidy & Cuff, 1986) to research on fundamental pedagogical issues (van Manen, 1984)" (Carson, 1992).

The term Collaborative Action Research can be attributed to Carson and Sumara (Carson & Sumara, 1992) who titled the proceedings of the Ninth

Invitational Conference of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies "Exploring Collaborative Action Research". Although specifically directed toward University/School collaborations, the conference papers reflect the notion that:

> "in action research, all parties are to have equal power" (Ripley & Hart, 1989: 34 in Carson & Sumara, 1992).

The goal of equal power is definitely part of the peace education process:

> "A 'total school' means a humane and nurturing community that encourages understanding, cooperation, openness, democratic, participation, just and equitable sharing of responsibilities, and critical but compassionate and nonviolent resolution of problems and conflicts" (Toh & Floresca-Cawagas, 1990, p. 225)

The goal of synthesizing peace education, collaboration, and action research is reflected in "Remembering Forward" (Carson, 1992).

It was my goal to use all these elements of peace education and collaborative action research to improve conflict resolution skills within the construct of a conflict manager program.

THE PROJECT SITE

Brentwood School is located in the center of the scenic, semi-rural, bayside island village, Brentwood Bay. It is a large elementary school with a student

population of approximately 430. The student population draws from a mixture of economic and cultural backgrounds. Approximately 10% of the students are from upper income families, 45% from middle income families and 45% lower-middle to lower income families. The village is a bedroom community for a large number of government workers and business people. who work in the provincial capital of Victoria. The village is also located in an agricultural zone which supports á number of riding stables, fruit and vegetable farms as well as sheep, llama, ostrich, poultry, and dairy farms. The village borders a Native Indian community, which contributes 15-20% of the student population. The rest of the student population is of predominantly European extraction.

Even prior to the implementation of the conflict manager program, the school could be described as a caring place where students and staff showed each other a high degree of respect. There has been stability among the staff of 19 teachers and 2 administrators, with a typical annual turnover of less than 15%. The parent committee has been active.

The school administration has made a special effort to integrate native students. This effort has including the hiring of two native teacher assistants, and the celebration of native Indian culture within the school.

The open and sharing environment of this school made it ideal for this collaborative research project.

ACTION RESEARCH: THEORY AND PRACTICE

> "Action research consisted in analysis, fact-finding, conceptualization, planning, execution, more fact-finding or evaluation; and then a repetition of this whole circle of activities; indeed a spiral of such circles" (Sanford, 1970: 4).

The fundamental concept behind action research consists of a cycle. First a starting point must be selected. This usually is a goal for improvement or change. Finding this goal requires analysis of what are the roots of the problem. This analysis usually stimulates fact finding. With some understanding of the currently perceived problem conceptualization of potential solutions follows. Before action begins the concepts are transformed into concrete planning. The action takes place with execution. Usually the action will cause some change which will require further analysis to understand. Thus the cycle begins again, usually leading to a spiral of research.

John Elliot has summarized this by describing action research as "the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it" (Elliot, 1991, p. 69).

Carefully undertaken action research has been found to be very effective in solving curriculum, praxis, and organizational problems in education. (Altrichter et. al., 1993).

Method of Inquiry

To clarify my project, I chose the four step action research process described in *Teachers Investigate their Work* (Altrichter et al., 1993, pp. 6-9)

The first step is to find a starting point. Three types of starting points are suggested: "An interest..., a difficulty..., an unclear situation..." (Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 35). The starting point was a response to a concern about the perceived increase of violence in society that was reflected in schools. The schools responded in a variety of ways. Programs such as "Second Step", "Learning for Living", "Career and Personal Planning" were added to the curriculum in order to support the development of conflict resolution skills and self-esteem. Programs such as the Peace keeper and Ambassador programs were initiated in order to give students the opportunity to practice and develop these skills.

This concern assured interest in a program that would develop conflict resolution skills. The difficulty was in finding time to train and manage the participants as well as to find time to have the participant involvement in the cycles. The conflict manager programs at two of the three schools were at risk of being discontinued because of lack of time and commitment. The unclear situation was: How to insure continued support for the programs.

The second step is clarifying the situation. As teachers, we have seen educational initiatives come and go. It was necessary to reflect on ways to insure the continuation, enhancement and expansion of the programs we were working so hard to develop. It seemed a network of collaboration and

cooperation was needed. The research question focused on how to set up such a network.

Teachers can investigate their work by activating tacit knowledge.

> "There are a number of methods available that help to make this knowledge accessible to self reflection: Activating tacit knowledge by introspection.... conversations and by being interviewed..., ordering conscious knowledge..., reading one's own actions..."
> (Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 48)

The three teachers of the collaborative team kept a log of their monthly meetings which helped to formulate new interpretations and cross links through introspection. Another source that provided the possibility to review past thoughts and actions were the agendas and notes of regularly scheduled meetings with students and playground supervisors. The teachers made presentations to students, parent groups, staffs at other schools and to the district as an Educator as Researcher project. These presentations provided for the participants to pose questions and ask for additional information and reflect back their provisional understanding. This procedure followed the notion of analytic discourse described in (Altrichter et al., 1993, pp. 58-59) and provided opportunities for introspection and clarification for the teachers as a result of being interviewed. The dialog model of conversation with a critical friend in (Altrichter et al., 1993, pp. 60-61) was also used by the teachers.

The third step is developing action strategies and putting them into practice.

> "Action strategies are actions which are planned and put into practice by the teacher-researcher in order to improve the situation or its context. Action strategies are connected to educational aims. They are used to maintain or develop the educational quality of a situation. Action strategies are typically tightly linked to theories developed from practice as a result of action research into the situation..." (Altrichter et al., 1993, p.158)

To develop strategies it was necessary to continually and cyclically meet and plan with all the participants that were being drawn into the project. After each meeting, or round of meetings, decisions would be taken on the next action, and the action implemented. Sometimes the action might be to set another meeting to expand the network. Sometimes the action might involve specific program implementation steps. The action would then be executed and a new cycle of clarification would begin.

A fourth aspect of this process is making the teachers' knowledge public. Since the action research was collaborative in nature, knowledge was shared at every step. This was necessary since parents, teachers, students, administrators, aides, and most members of the school culture were participants. This is one aspect in which collaborative action research may differ from other forms of action research, since the collaboration requires continual public knowledge.

In addition to this ongoing communication with the participants, other broadly based communication developed including newspaper, magazine,

and national television coverage.

The participation of the district's Educator as Researcher Committee helped with the distribution of information throughout the district, and also provided opportunities for teachers from other districts to have access to the research. This became important with the publication of a "Conflict Managers Program Handbook" by the district which has achieved Canada wide distribution because of the wider collaborative involvement.

The role of publicity is also significant in expanding interest in collaboration as well as increasing accessibility to the research.

In addition to these four steps, other important aspects of action research methodology were considered. Triangulation is one of these. . .

> "triangulation consists of a combination of observation and interview, whereby data on a particular situation are collected from three perspectives ('corners')
>
> - the teacher's perspective (by an interview)
> - the perspective of individual pupils (by interviews)
> - the perspective of a neutral third party (by observation)"
>
> (Altrichter et al., 1993, p. 115).

In our case there were more than three 'corners' to the triangle. Many parties were involved in the collaboration, so as many perspectives as possible were incorporated to get a more detailed and balanced picture of the situation.

This triangulation involved surveys, interviews, and collaboration dialogs focused solely on project status. In the first two years of the project, formal surveys were conducted. During the first year, the evaluation was not as extensive because not enough time had been allowed. However, hidden contradictions within the project quickly became visible enabling a more profound interpretation. This was especially evident since the opinions of the playground supervisors, students, teachers, administration and parents were of equal weight.

Our evaluation was based on two surveys: students in the program and playground supervisors. In the second year, the evaluation process was expanded to include the experience an knowledge gained from the cycles elucidated above as well as focus groups.

An additional collaborative effort was necessary in order to compare and contrast the different accounts of the knowledge and experiences of the three teachers as well as the information from outside sources. In the second year the teachers relied on the additional resource of the prospective of a third party, the facilitator assigned to our group.

COLLABORATION: A METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

My interest in action research was confirmed as a result of my participation in a mini-conference on collaborative action research. The theme of the Collaborative Action Research Conference was, "Action Research as Building and Dwelling in Relationships". I was a member of a panel focused on Developing Collaborative Relationships.

Based on my experience, I expected that all the parties collaborating in these new alliances would experience changes in attitude regarding their relationships with each other.

I hoped that through critical reflection, the necessary skills and attitudes would develop so that the project became one of collaboration. My aim was that the conflict manager project I was undertaking would be driven by collaborative action research.

Collaboration versus Cooperation

I feel that it is important to distinguish between collaboration and cooperation. In some alliances cooperation is the expected norm and may be the most appropriate relationship for a specified purpose. Since an important part of action research is critical reflection I shall discuss situations in which my confusion about whether the relationship was cooperative or collaborative led to frustration– a feeling of not only not being heard, but of being railroaded. I shall point out some of the pitfalls in trying to establish collaborative alliances.

Cooperation

> "Cooperation occurs when two organizations (or parties) reach a mutual agreement and work together while retaining their separate and autonomous programs (or agendas). " (Wideen, 1989)

An example of cooperation is the traditional relationship between schools and universities regarding teacher training. However, this tradition is being challenged and relations of collaboration are being explored (for example the Cross Departmental Collaborative Program Development at the University of Alberta initiated by Dr. T. Carson).

According to Shumsky,

> "The literature speaks about individual and cooperative action research as distinct processes. In most cases, however, even the so called individual action research will tend to have important elements of cooperative work. These elements may range from a setup where a group is working on a common problem, to a setup where the members share a major interest but work on individual problems. The latter utilize the group for consultation and support"
> (Shumsky, 1956: .81).

My research began by developing a cooperative network. I knew that other teachers and administrators shared an interest in programs that addressed society's concern about youth violence Many of the efforts were individual initiatives.

A criticism of teacher-researchers is that they may choose to research a question that is important to them but is of no value to others. This can create an obstacle to professional collaboration (Gillis, 1988). This was not the case regarding action research into youth violence. I have already mentioned in my introduction, the efforts to implement the Ambassador Program at Brentwood School, and the district wide concern about violence

in the schools precipitated by an incident involving a student and a weapon.

The school district also set up a 'Violence Prevention Committee' as a sub-committee of the District's Protocol committee to develop a violence prevention program within the context of safe and healthy schools .

This broad based community concern about youth violence was further focused by a second incident in which a student was kicked to death while other students looked on (Victoria Times Colonist, 1993).

In summary, the research project began with a commitment of cooperation from the school district as confirmed through an interview with the superintendent, and from the school as confirmed through meetings with the administration and staff at Brentwood School.

Collaboration

Collaboration, as opposed to cooperation requires a closer relationship between parties sharing a common interest. It requires more commitment and involvement.

> "Collaboration can involve joint planning and implementation, and sometimes evaluation, where responsibility is shared. Thus collaboration requires much more time and effort than cooperation because the activities are shared not simply allowed" (Wideen, 1989).

Wideen makes a point that the amount of time and effort that the parties are willing and able to contribute must be considered before entering into a

collaborative relationship. It has also been my experience that since the responsibility is shared there seems to be less risk taking. I have found myself questioning the level of trust among the various participants. The results are what I call, 'pabulum solutions'. It's like offering corn at a meal instead of fiddle heads; as corn is familiar, where as fiddle heads may be unknown and serving them may pose a risk.

Since I view trust and risk taking as important elements in collaboration, I found the description of collaboration offered by Peter Norman and Stan Shapson apt:

> "Genuine collaboration requires new skills and attitudes, including mutual trust and the willingness to take risks. " (Norman & Shapson, 1989)

Context of the Project - Background

In the fall of 1994, I returned from academic leave to Saanich School District #63 on Vancouver Island where I held the position of French as a second language teacher assigned to Brentwood Elementary School. I had been at the school from 1986. During that time I held various positions which influenced my view of collaboration and how it differs from cooperation. I shall share my reflections, particularly on my confusion between collaboration and cooperation and what I learned from my experiences.

Collaboration in the Context of the Negotiation Process of a Teacher Association or Teacher Union.

I was Vice President of the Saanich Teachers Association during the first contract negotiations of working and learning conditions. These negotiations were conducted regarding a collective agreement using the union model. This led to my first experience in going on strike in the spring of 1991. At that time the Social Credit government was entrenched. This government had imposed a period of restraint on the B.C. education system. The system was a so adversely affected by the cutbacks that teachers became radicalized. It was in this climate that teachers became unionized and gained the right to strike and to negotiate working and learning conditions for the first time The union model fostered a sense of 'us and them'.

This model did not foster collaboration. My experience of the negotiation process was one of forced cooperation influenced by power relationships, lack of trust and lack of shared information. It did not serve as a model for the conflict resolution skills we were introducing in the schools. In the conflict resolution model the aim is to find win-win solutions to problem solving.

My experience with the union model is that it results in win-lose or lose-lose solutions. Due to my frustration with the process, I had tendered my resignation as a member of the executive of our local union. However, my resignation was not accepted and it purpose was lost in the euphoria of our 'win'.

Teachers won an increase in salary and won on the issue of class size.

Teachers gained improvements in working and learning conditions in the contract.

Since that time, the local school boards have developed a province wide bargaining unit in an attempt to equalize the power relationship with the union. Since that time, bargaining on a provincial scale has resulted in frustration and loss on both sides.

In is my contention that conflict manager programs need to be supported by an education system that is based on more cooperation and collaboration. Unfortunately, the union model of contract negotiating is counter productive.

In a "Dialogue on Gandhian principles and techniques for conflict resolution" the authors use the voice of Aling Arminda to explain the Gandhian principles of non-violence and how they relates to the conflicts and threats we constantly face.

> " [we]. . . can learn to resolve differences peacefully. We must stop seeing the conflict as a win- lose situation where one side must win and the other side must lose. Both sides can win something if they are willing to listen to the needs and concerns of each other to find the real causes of the conflict and negotiate a solution that will benefit everyone" (Toh and Floresca-Cawagas, 1990).

Collaboration in the Context of a Staff Committee

On the school level, there were active collaborative groups. I served as a staff representative for the Saanich Teachers Association. In that capacity, I received training in developing a staff committee. The staff committee was to serve as a venue for teacher empowerment in the decision making process at the school level. During the first two years, the staff committee met with the administration by invitation only. The staff members and administration contributed agenda items regarding school policy and the running of the school. The staff committee in cooperation with administration worked together to develop recommendations and decisions on issues brought to the staff committee and the staff committee chairperson made a presentation at the monthly staff meeting. As the staff committee got more involved in the decision making process, they needed more information from the administration, so the administration attended more meetings. Eventually, the staff committee recognized the administration as full members of the staff committee. The group dynamics changed from the staff committee working in cooperation with administration to one in which the staff committee of teachers and administrators worked in collaboration.

Based on this experience, it is my view that old networks and power relationships must be abandoned and replaced by new relationships. During the two years I felt a new relationship with administration emerge in which teachers and administrators were working together in collaboration toward common goals. I learned that collaboration occurs when power relationships are not exercised and there is mutual trust and respect among the parties. Since collaboration does require time and commitment, and maybe because of

the increase in trust and respect, teachers began to opt out of many of the areas of decision making. We were able to choose the areas in which we wanted to collaborate.

Collaboration in the Context of a District Steering Committee.

The Primary Program Steering Committee was established in response to, "The Year 2000" initiative of the B. C. Ministry of Education. The committee of 14 from our school district, included: trustees, parents, district staff, teachers, school administrators and support staff. As a member of this committee I expected that this would be an experience in collaboration.

I was wrong.

At the first few meetings there was enthusiasm, but it quickly became clear to most of the participants that this was a top-down exercise.

As a result of my expectation of collaboration I experienced much frustration. From this experience I have learned to ask two important questions: Does the role provide for joint planning, implementation and evaluation? Who is setting the agenda? In collaboration these tasks are shared.

Collaboration in the Context of L.S.A.'s (Local Specialists Associations)

An L.S.A. is a local chapter of a provincial association of teacher specialists. These associations provide support for teachers will particular needs due to their specialty.

The L.S.A., Saanich Modern Language Teachers Association (S. M. L. T. A.) was formed in the fall of 1991. It is affiliated with the British Columbia Association of Teachers of Modern Languages (B. C. A. T. M. L.). As president of this group, I experienced collaboration. One example was in changing the provincial exam to better reflect what and how we were teaching. The problem was brought forth by a small number of secondary French teachers who had previously complained about the exam but had not affected change. Elementary and middle school French teachers entered into the problem solving process. The network was extended province wide through our provincial affiliation. Through collaboration among all French teachers in the L.S.A. regardless of grade level taught and through cooperation with other L.S.A.'s province wide, collaboration was ultimately achieved with the Ministry officials, and the provincial exam was changed.

This experience supports my view that collaboration among teachers is an effective way to institute change and that collaboration works best in the context of a collaboration- cooperation network. We were a group of teachers working together to solve a problem. Ultimately we were able to work together across administrative lines with the representatives from the Ministry of Education. Our relationship was based on mutual trust, respect and sharing of information.

Reflections on Collaboration Relative to this Action Research Project

Reflecting on all of the cooperation/collaboration experiences described above, and how they related to the action research project at hand, it was clear to me that one of the primary issues was how to involve the other

participants as true collaborators. This would mean a sharing of control, and would result in a much more meaningful and effective project.

With the issue of collaborative involvement in mind, I contacted the two teachers that had initiated conflict manager programs similar to the "Ambassador Program" that had been initiated at Brentwood School. These were individual initiatives that resulted from the interest of these teachers. These teachers had elicited the support of their principals before initiating their programs and had thus, assumed that they had the support of the district. The group I eventually chose to work in was the "Educator as Researcher Professional Development Group". This "Educator as Researcher" Project developed into a collaborative group of these teachers and myself which brought three schools together to develop a network to support and improve conflict manager programs. We were able to access funds to provide for release time which helped to maintain the efforts they were making. The teachers modeled the conflict resolution, problem solving and active listening skills they were trying to impart to students. We developed a collaborative relationship of mutual trust and respect which led to risk taking, changing of attitudes and improvement of the programs.

In the collaborative action research model, all participants (including the students) were involved in the planning, implementing and evaluation stages of the research cycle. Methods used to cultivate collaboration were: collaborative groups, student-directed inquiry (SDI), focus groups, interviews, and surveys. The development of the collaborative - cooperative network, and the associated relevance and accessibility to others is the substance of the action research reported in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3 BEGINNING THE ACTION RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

Finding a starting point in the action research model meant that the research question should eventually emerge from the fieldwork rather than be imposed from the interests of an outside observer. My first step was to make contact with those in power positions whose support would help to insure the success of the project. I wanted to find out if they shared my interest and concern about the perceived increase in youth violence and the development of conflict manager programs in elementary schools as a pro-active response to this concern.

During the first round of making contact, I was referred to people who shared an interest and concern to the point of becoming potential collaborators on the project. My perception of the hierarchical nature of the educational structure became evident by the increase in my stress level as I made calls to request interviews with those in power positions. This section relates the process I experienced of breaking down power barriers in order to develop collaborative relationships.

I had expected to use the established "Ambassador Program" at Brentwood School as a starting point. The program was initiated by the vice-principal, the year I left on academic leave. Upon my return, I was surprised to learn that

there were no plans to carry on the program. The vice -principal had been assigned as Interim principal at a neighboring school and the sponsorship of the program had been passed on to an intern who had a special interest in developing conflict resolution skills. The lack of success of the program at that time will be contrasted to the present success and expansion on the program. The success will be attributed to the development of network of collaboration and cooperation.

RECONNAISSANCE

The reconnaissance of support for the conflict manager program began with initial contacts that were made in the spring of 1994.

When I returned to Saanich B. C. and School District #63, I made a conscious effort to soften and diffuse traditional and formal power relationships. Although the district encouraged the collaborative model, we were all in transition in seeking ways to make it work. My first contact was with the principal and returned vice-principal of Brentwood School where I had been reassigned. I received assurance from the school administration that reestablishing the Ambassador program was of interest to them and had their support. The administration suggested that I contact two other schools in the district that had conflict manager programs in place so that I might find more information about developing the program. The range of contacts continued to expand as those contacted suggested others. The contacts included the Superintendent, the Assistant Superintendent, a person involved in the development of the Educator as Researcher Committee and also Primary Program Coordinator, the Modern language Coordinator-as critical friend ,

and chairman of the school board, all from the district office. Contact was made with the Peace Education Coordinator at the British Columbia Teachers' association (BCTF). Contact was made with the coordinator of the peer-helper program at the middle school where our students continued on after finishing their program at Brentwood School. Contact was made with students at this school and the senior school who had been Ambassadors while at Brentwood. Contact was made with other schools both in and out of the district that had an interest in the program. Contact was made with parents, formally through the Parent Advisory Council and informally through telephone contacts with their children. Formal and informal contact was made with various members of the school culture at the site of the project.

My perception of the system in which I worked was that of a hierarchical model, one of a hegemonic master-principal. This perception developed from past experience. As an elementary school teacher it had been my experience that the teaching staff was mostly female and the administration was always male. The relationship I had with previous administrators was paternalistic. I accepted their authority in determining many aspects of teaching experience from what I taught, to how I dressed. While teaching in the Catholic system in Calgary, I called the board office to make an appointment to talk to the superintendent about a question of policy. I was told that direct contact was not possible and that I should show more respect for the office, and not request to take up the valuable time of one so highly placed.

Since titles are used to define the hierarchy, I used humorous titles to help break down the psychological barriers I felt in approaching those in power positions. In a paper on collaboration and cooperation I wrote about some of the contacts I planned to make upon my return from academic leave. I gave the paper to my principal upon my return. He suggested that empowerment of teachers through the development of staff committees in being involved in the decision making had been helpful in bring his rooster role to an end. He felt that my use of humorous titles would have a positive effect as I tried to develop relationships. He shared my paper with the superintendent and chairman of the school board. eventually, all those named in the paper were made aware of the names I had given them. All of the interviews were friendly and productive.

The first contacts I made in trying to establish cooperation and identify possible parties for collaboration were:

- *Space ranger - observer of heavenly bodies, (chairman of the school board and astronomer)* He was not available since he was in New Zealand observing celestial phenomena at the time of my return. Eventually contact was made. Although the chairman stepped down to the position of member of the school board upon his return, he assured me of his cooperative support for my project. Although I did not have a personal interview with the new chairperson of the school board, I had been assured of her cooperation by my principal.

- *The Emperor - without any clothes, (superintendent).* He assured me that my research would fit into the broad perspective of district goals, indicated

his personal interest and cooperation in his role as superintendent and suggested that I contact the coordinator for the Learning for Living program.

This contact proved helpful in leading me to a possible research question and a possible collaborator. Eventually this contact led to a collaborative relationship as this person was named as facilitator of the Educator as Researcher Project that developed.

The superintendent also suggested that I contact the Modern Languages coordinator.

This contact also proved helpful especially in acting as a critical friend. He read and critiqued my reports.

- *The rooster, (my principal).* He updated me on the progress of, "The Ambassador Program" and confirmed his interest and cooperation. He has been a valuable critical friend. He directed me to a University of Victoria Child and Youth Care Intern Student who had helped to train student ambassadors for conflict resolution in the school.

  This contact provided me with more information which was helpful in defining a research question.

  The principal also pointed to a possible collaboration with the University of Victoria. So far this avenue has not been further explored.

He also suggested that I contact the middle school child and youth care worker who had been instrumental in developing conflict resolution skills at our school before moving on to the middle school and I had enjoyed working with her. She gave enthusiastic support but did not have the time available to become a collaborator. This contact has been maintained and has resulted in linking the elementary and middle school as well as involvement in a T.V. documentary which included students in the middle school who had been Ambassadors in Grade 5.

- *Hot wheels scooter racer, (vice-principal)* . He became principal at another school during my absence. We held a meeting at the Prairie Inn, known for its house beer, and a favorite meeting place for teachers to get together and discuss educational issues. He suggested that I get in touch with the Saanich Educator as Researcher Group.

  This contact later provided the opportunity for collaboration. He also put me on to some resource materials.

  He later returned to Brentwood as Vice - principal and has continued to support the project through collaboration and cooperation.

- *Serendipity, (primary program coordinator).* She gave me a wealth of resource materials presently being used in the district. She suggested that I contact the coordinator for playground supervisors.

  This turned out to be an important contact. I later set up monthly meetings with playground supervisors and conflicts manager students so

that we could work collaboratively in maintaining and improving the program

The primary program coordinator also suggested that I make contact with those involved in the Saanich Educator as Researcher Group. She had been instrumental in setting up the Educator as Researcher program as a forum for professional development.

- *The money machine, (The Parent Advisory Council - PAC)* . I made a presentation at a Parent Advisory Council meeting. I told the group about the program and asked for funding for jackets. The PAC approved funding for the jackets the Ambassadors would wear to make them visible to others would needed help.

  Following this first introduction, the parent group has proven to be a valuable contact and has provided collaborative and cooperative support by becoming involved in training, and providing funds and support for special events like field trips.

- *The Roundabout, (University of Alberta).* This network includes my supervisor, Dr. Toh Swee-Hin, (professor) who helped to develop my interest and knowledge in peace education and conflict resolution; my committee member, Dr. Terry Carson (professor) who helped to develop my interest and knowledge in action research; my committee member Dr. Foster Walker (professor emeritus) who inspired me to use the power of the heart in my work and to aim for real dialog in collaboration; my contacts from course work which provided a circle of knowledgeable

critical friends; my extended network of library and computer access, which has provided me with resource material, and the ability to contact other researchers in Canada and the United States who are working in the same area of interest.

Reflections on Initial Reconnaissance

The use of humorous titles for my contacts was an attempt to change the relationship with those with whom I hoped would be cooperators and collaborators. This was an attempt to overcome the traditional sense of power relationships that existed with traditional titles as a result of my experience as a teacher. I took a risk in that some of my contacts might have taken offense. I found that my use of "poetic license" caused smiles and good will. I found that the use of humor helped to establish collegial relationships based on trust and mutual respect.

(Elliot, 1991:7) describes two factors which contribute to the quality of discourse, the personal and structural dimension. It is better to know one another as persons beyond our professional roles. We should develop a management structure that is collegial rather than bureaucratic.

I have continued to reflect on the way relationships build as I extend my collaboration network. I have found humor helpful in breaking down psychological barriers to power relationships. The chairman of the school board is part of the power structure of hiring, firing and defining my job. Thinking of him as a *space ranger* helped me to perceive our relationship as

working together in charting a course. The Superintendent as part of that power structure, became more accessible as the barriers were removed by the symbolic removal of clothes as the *Emperor without any clothes*.. The principal as *rooster* is symbolic of the elementary school system which has predominantly female teachers, 'the hens', and male principals, 'the roosters'. The Vice-principal's title as *Hot wheels - scooter racer* came from a cultural day event at our school in which he spent the day leading 'canoe races ' (scooters) across the ice flows (gym mats) of the St. Lawrence River, (gym floor), while I played the spoons and danced with groups of children as they traveled from Quebec to the Native Reserve to China and Australia. (throughout the school). It was a day of so much laughter and fun that we were hard put to call ourselves professionals who got paid for playing. *Serendipity*, the primary program coordinator, had a holistic approach to teaching which I began to model as I moved from the hierarchical model to the web model of connecting sites of collaboration and cooperation. *The money machine*, The Parent Advisory Committee, defined my first approach to this group in which I made a presentation and asked for money to buy jackets. Later parents became involved in attending meetings with conflict manager students and playground supervisors. They were involved in a field trip to buddy with conflict managers from another school. They were also involved in the spring training workshop. Their involvement in the training was so successful that their role in training could be expanded. *The Roundabout*, the University of Alberta, was a way to describe the role the university, especially my supervisor played in helping to direct me as I expanded the web.

The use of humorous titles helped me in initiating contact with the power structure. However, I was very formal in initial interviews and became less formal as barriers broke down and personal relationships built.

The two other teachers had also established comfort levels in dealing with administration. One of the teachers had been an interim administrator and had experienced administrators' meetings where teacher requests for support had been dealt with. She prepared the formal letters we needed for specific support. the other teacher had a female administrator who acted on her behalf when needed. These relationships had three ingredients: mutual trust, mutual respect and humor. We felt secure in calling on these members of the power structure for support.

INITIAL CONTACTS

Chairperson of the school board

In my written request for permission to do field work in 63 School District, I stated that the research procedure would be, "Collaborative Action Research". The direction I took was pro-active in that the experience of my previous seven years of teaching in the district led me to believe that the district provided safe and happy places for students. This was borne out as the schools went through the accreditation process. In response to parent, teacher, and student surveys on the question, " Do you feel your school is a safe place?" the reply was between 80% and !00% -YES. My plan was to network with parents, community representatives, as well as students, teachers, administrators and other interested district personnel. My request was presented to the board and accepted. The response came by way of a

formal letter which also gave information on procedures to follow regarding rights of those involved in the research.

The procedures of research ethics set out by the district were easily met. The district expectation was that all participation be on a voluntary basis. All participation was voluntary, including the students who volunteered to be conflict managers. The district asked that the identity of all the participants be kept confidential.

At Brentwood School, all Ambassadors had consent forms signed by parents or guardians that gave permission to use information and pictures in publications. The district asked that the part of the project involving students be carried out with a minimum of instructional time. The action research project did not demand additional time from the students. The district expects that the results of the research project be shared with School District #63. The district will receive a copy of the thesis as accepted by the University of Alberta.

During the course of the research project, the chairperson attended many of the professional activities I attended that related to my topic. During these informal meetings her interest and support became more evident.

Superintendent

I first contacted the superintendent to request permission to and see if my project would enhance district goals. I was invited to his office to discuss my plans. I was informed that, indeed, my project fit into the district priorities under the designation (at that time) of "Learning for Living – Healthy

Schools -Wellness". Due to events recent at that time (teen age violence outside of the schools but within the district) conflict resolution had become a priority.

Other Influential People

I sought cooperation from positive influential people within the power structure. These included the Assistant Superintendent, the Primary Program Coordinator, the Learning for Living Coordinator, and of course my principal and vice-principal. Sometimes my contact would result in my being directed to other sources within the District.

I was informed by the president of the district PAC's of another event which brought pressure on the school district to respond to youth violence. The president of the district PAC's knew of my interest and concern of youth violence and suggested that I ask permission to attend the first meeting of the newly formed "District Violence Prevention Committee." I asked for and was granted permission. Although the event did not happen in school , a high school student from a district high school was beaten to death at a nearby fast food outlet while other students looked on.

These events combined with a general concern in society about a perceived increase in youth violence resulted in a district response to youth violence becoming a priority.

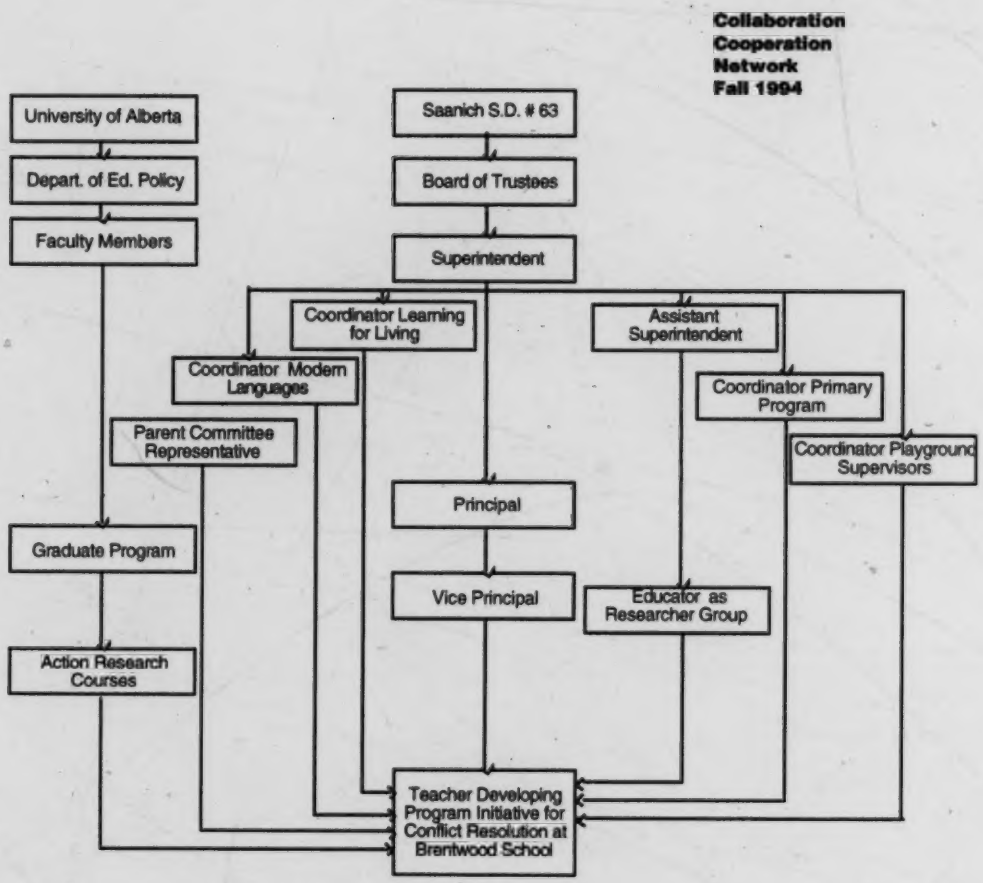
The proposal to develop conflict manager programs in light of these recent events was well received and was insured support by the district. The assumptions were that besides addressing the immediate concerns it was

important to develop a long term plan in which teaching young children skills in resolving conflicts peacefully would be a significant contribution to the overall plan. It was also an assumption that a pro-active approach to developing these skills in a young child was more beneficial than trying to correct aggressive or anti-social behaviors later.

The Educator as Researcher professional development program had been established in the district during the time I was on academic leave. The assistant superintendent and primary program coordinator were among those who suggested that the teachers from the three schools should apply for an Educator as Researcher grant. We applied for a grant and our project was accepted. As a result of this support, we could collaborate on the development of the conflict manager programs in the three schools. We also had the benefit of a district coordinator to help us in our project.. The district provided funding for some release time so that we could meet more frequently.

As Figure 1, my diagram of the Collaboration/Cooperation Network of Fall 1994 depicts, the power structure has square edges and a linear flow of power and control downward to the Educator–as–Researcher professional development project. It is interesting to note that at that time my own feeling of network support also included a side lobe flowing downward from the academic authority of my degree granting institution – the University of Alberta.

FIGURE 1


Collaboration
Cooperation
Network
Fall 1994
University of Alberta
Depart. of Ed. Policy
Faculty Members
Graduate Program
Action Research Courses
Saanich S.D. # 63
Board of Trustees
Superintendent
Principal
Vice Principal
Coordinator Learning for Living
Coordinator Modern Languages
Parent Committee Representative
Assistant Superintendent
Coordinator Primary Program
Coordinator Playground Supervisors
Educator as Researcher Group
Teacher Developing Program Initiative for Conflict Resolution at Brentwood School

DEVELOPING THE ACTION RESEARCH QUESTION

In collaborative action research, the research question should develop from the field. It should also be a question which is of interest to my collaborators as well as to me and which will directly affect my working and learning conditions. In "Finding a Starting Point" (Altrichter, 1993: 35), Marion Dodds mentions three types of starting points: 1. Interest; 2. Difficulty; 3. 'Unclear' situations.

As a result of my reconnaissance in gaining support for the conflict manager program through the building of a network of cooperation, I found out that there was a high interest in my topic, "Violence in the Schools". I also found out that there was an interest in the development of conflict manager and peer-helper programs in the district. In an interview with the Learning for Living coordinator, an 'unclear' situation was to what extent, conflict resolution skills were being taught in the schools and whether or not this was an effective way to respond to violence in schools. The Learning for Living curriculum was presently undergoing revision, and was to be changed to Personal Planning. The development of conflict resolution skills was to be included in the Personal Planning objectives.

The action research model as interpreted by Elliot states that:

> "The general idea should be allowed to shift. Reconnaissance should involve analysis (reflection) as well as fact-finding and should constantly recur in the spiral of activities, rather than occur only at the beginning. Implementation of an action step is not always easy, and

> one should not proceed to evaluate the effects of an action until one has monitored the extent to which it has been implemented" (Elliot, 1991: 70).

In accordance with the spirit of this model, I did not go into the field with a defined research question but rather a general idea that had developed as a result of the contacts I have made. I expected that my collaboration network would continue to shift and that collaborators might choose to become cooperators or vice versa. It was also important that the structure allow for collaborators to be involved in all aspects of the research, planning, evaluation and implementation and that all information be shared in accordance with ethical guide lines.

> "A basic belief of the action research movement is that a promising way of initiating and securing change is by involving the potential consumers of the research results in the planning, analysis and interpretation of results. " (Shumsky, 1956: 82)

Realistically, I saw a core group of collaborators which would include the target groups- students, parents, and teachers as being the potential consumers involved in all aspects of the process. However, since violence in the school potentially involves all school personnel as well the community and society at large; I saw an extended group of cooperators who needed to be kept informed and to have the opportunity for input.

School Year, 1994-95

Over the course of the 1994/1995 school year my efforts included innumerable meetings, consultations and discussions both within and outside the conventional power structure.

Initially, most of the time was used in developing the Ambassador program at Brentwood. The time was spent in the training and supervising of students.

I received support through what became scheduled monthly meetings with two other teachers who had similar programs in place at their schools through the district's Teacher -as-Researcher program. The coordinator for "Learning for Living" (renamed "Personal Planning") also attended many of these meetings. Parents, playground supervisors, other staff and administrators, and other stake holders became increasingly involved in learning about, and supporting the program.

In October, 1994, I attended an Educator as Researcher information meeting. At that meeting I expressed an interest in developing a conflict manager program at Brentwood School. I met with the "Learning for Living " coordinator for the first time. My purpose was to access information about Educator as Researcher Projects and the District Resource Center learning resources that may be helpful in setting up a program and training students. At that meeting, the Learning for Living coordinator , and the assistant -superintendent suggested that I should make an application to the Educator as researcher Core Committee. so that my project would become project supported by the district. I also found some resource materials that provided

lessons on the development of conflict resolution skills for elementary school age children.

In October, 1994, School district #63 held its first Violence Prevention Committee Meeting. Although, I had not been invited to this meeting, upon the suggestion of the chairperson of the district Parent Advisory committee, who knew of my interest, I asked for and was granted permission to attend this meeting. At this meeting I again met the 'Learning for Living ' coordinator. We continued our discussion of conflict manager programs and the possibility of working together on an Educator as Researcher project. She informed me about an in service she was preparing on 'Bully-proofing'. I began to look for teacher colleagues to work with me in an Educator as Researcher project. I signed up for the 'Bully-proofing' in-service. The meeting also provided an opportunity to make contact with parents, community representatives and other educators interested in violence prevention. I kept a list of the participants as possible collaborators, for future reference.

Later that month, I met with a teacher colleague at Saanichton School. She had been suggested to me by my administrators as a possible collaborator and member of the Educator as Researcher team I was trying to initiate. She was the coordinator of the conflict manager program at her school. She shared her materials and experience as to how to set up a program and train students. She expressed an interest in joining me in an Educator as Researcher project. She also expressed concern about the time she could commit to the project, as she was already involved in her own pursuits of developing her counseling skills. We decided that her experience as

coordinator of the conflict manager program at her school would help me in reviving the program at my school. We also decided that both school programs would benefit by our working together. We expected that our roles as coordinators of conflict manager programs would be improved as a result of our contact. She agreed to become a team member of the Educator as Researcher project.

That same month, I met with counselor in charge of the 'Peer- Helper' program at Bayside Middle School. This was an information sharing session as this counselor had participated in the original planning of the Brentwood Ambassador program at Brentwood. Some of the students in the Peer Helper program were previously Ambassadors at Brentwood. We explored a possible link between the schools as part of network. We explored the possibility of her becoming an Educator as Researcher team member. She decided to become a cooperative member of the network.

In November, I met with the teacher who was the coordinator of the conflict manager program at Lochside School. She shared her materials and experience as to how to set up a program and train students. We talked about applying for an Educator as Researcher grant so that we would have time to collaborate. We felt that collaboration would insure the continuation of and improvement of the programs in the three schools. We decided to set a meeting the following day for the three of us to get together and formulate an application for an Educator as Researcher Grant.

The next day, I attended a scheduled meeting with the Primary Program Coordinator at the School Board Office (S.B.O.). She provided more

resource materials on skill development such as active listing and self-esteem building. She suggested the Learning for Living coordinator who was also a school counselor and another school counselor who had done a project on Bully-proofing as possible contacts. Letters were faxed to all three elementary school counselors. Although, I had met with the Learning for Living coordinator on two previous occasions mention above, this was my first formal contact with the school counselors. The third counselor was the counselor assigned to Brentwood School. In the letter I proposed that the conflict manager programs needed a support network and that they might become part of that network. The Brentwood program was almost terminated because of lack of support and the Saanichton program was in danger of being discontinued because of lack of support. This vulnerability occurred when the program depended on the interest of one teacher in the school. All three counselors responded with a willingness to help support the programs. However, no attempt was made to define their roles.

Later that day, I met with the coordinators of the conflict manager programs at Saanichton and Lochside schools. We decided to apply for an "Educator as Researcher" grant. We decided to prepare the application at our next meeting. We set dates for future meetings (approximately one per month). We decided to invite the coordinator of the Learning for Living curriculum to attend our meetings. She accepted and was later assigned to our group as facilitator. We shared materials concerning the training of students. (Since there was a wealth of materials available in this area, there was no felt need to develop materials.) We shared experiences about the various materials and strategies we were familiar with. My two colleagues shared their experiences in the training of students and the development of their programs with me.

In November, I also attended The Second Annual Focus Conference on the Prevention of Youth Violence which was held in Victoria. The Learning for living coordinator and the two other elementary school counselors, a principal of one of our district elementary schools that had instituted a peer-helper program also attended the conference.

The conference provided an opportunity for people of like interests to network and to gain practical insights vital to advancing understanding of effective approaches to achieving a violence-free school. The role of publicity in supporting violence prevention initiatives supported the action research model of making teachers' knowledge public. (Altrichter, 1993:7). After listening to a presentation about the role of police in "The Anti-Violence Community School: A Police/School Partnership - A Pilot Project. (Ryan, et al., 1994), the group from Saanich met for lunch and discussed the role of police in schools as a way to insure school safety.

There was general agreement that police presence in schools needed consideration and reflection. I expressed a concern about using metal detectors and police in schools as a way to insure school safety. I made a mental note to find out more about my school district's relationship to the police and justice system. This relationship might provide for future opportunities for collaboration.

Later in November I met with the teachers from two schools mentioned above and the Learning for Living coordinator. We met at Lochside School to discuss the Educator as Researcher application. My two teacher colleagues

wished to support and enhance their conflict manager programs. I wanted to revive the program that was to be discontinued at my school because of a lack of a teacher-sponsor. The Learning for Living coordinator agreed to attend meetings to lend support. One teacher sponsor affirmed she could not attend many of the meetings but would contribute her experiences with her school program and would be kept informed by phone and fax.

Choosing the Research Method

In response to the concern about violence in schools our area of interest was: The development of conflict resolution skills through such programs as the Peace keeper programs at Lochside and Saanichton Schools and the Ambassador program at Brentwood School. Part of the process is a training program for Grade 5 students.

When we came to prepare the application for the Educator as Researcher project, we found that the model was an action research model which meant that we needed to work collaboratively. We decided that we needed to focus on collaboration. *How to set up a collaboration network in order to support our conflict manager programs?* became our question for action research.

The numerous meetings that took place led to immediate and future connections of the collaboration-cooperation network. It was as a result of these meetings that I became aware of the Educator as Researcher professional development opportunity. I was also secure in knowing that I had access to information for beginning a conflict manager program and training students. The middle school counselor, sponsor of the peer helper program did not

become a member of the Educator as Researcher team but did act as a critical friend and is a collaborator on the T.V. documentary to be aired in the fall of 1996. The importance of the role of publicity took on a significant emphasis as the research progressed.

In collaborative action research, the research question should develop from our experience in collaboration. We were starting from the assumption that in order to affect change, a collaboration network has to be in place. It was our hope that we would be able to provide a model on how to set up a collaboration network so that change would take place. In our model the network would include cooperation in which individuals or groups lend support and share information and collaboration, and in which individuals or groups are involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the initiatives.

Conflict resolution skills were taught in the classroom as part of the Learning for Living curriculum. During the first year, the administration arranged my timetable so that I could teach the Second-Step component that had been instituted by our school district. This component dealt specifically with conflict resolution skills. As coordinator of the conflict manager program I tried to develop a relationship of collaboration with the students. At meetings, students presented conflicts they had experienced. Students were encouraged to help other students by sharing stories about their successes. My focus was to develop conflict resolution skills in an atmosphere of collaboration.

In the first place, we needed a research process that would encompass the following objectives. We needed a framework of collaboration and cooperation which would identify the positions and roles necessary to maintain a support network for the programs we were developing. This objective developed from the concern that the programs we were developing in our schools depended too much on the individual teachers who were implementing them, and did not have enough permanency of their own.

For example, the Ambassador program was initiated at Brentwood School in 1992. The person who developed the program was transferred and the program began to lose its support. The program was about to be dropped until another interested person showed interest in reinstating it.

We wanted to foster collaboration among teachers and to identify key elements that have stimulated their desire to develop programs that promote the use of conflict resolution skills taught in the Learning for Living curriculum. The addition of the coordinator for Learning for Living who was assigned as facilitator of our project by the Educator as Researcher Core Committee, helped in establishing a link with the curriculum. This was a step in identifying the framework.

We wanted to foster collaboration among other interested groups. A wealth of research indicates that the problem of violence in schools is a community problem – a reflection of violence in society which suggests that providing a safe and peaceful educational environment is the shared responsibility of the school, home and community.

We also needed to consider the structure of the school culture itself as indicated in the discussion of structural violence in chapter one. These relationships needed to be explored as to ways to extend cooperation to collaboration in identifying the framework.

The Educator as researcher Core committee provided us with a copy of an article "Socially Critical Action Research" (Tripp, 1990). In this article the repeated cycle of four basic moments: planning, acting, fact finding, analysis are presented. The Core committee recommended this model as a way for us to proceed. Their recommendation supported my interest in using this model.

It is also a model recommended for teachers investigating their work. (Altrichter, 1993; Tripp, 1990). I suggested that since we planned to focus on collaboration that the model of "Collaborative Action Research" (Carson & Sumara, 1992) was the appropriate research method for our project. The other members of the Educator as Researcher group agreed.

There was a sharing of ideas on how to improve the school programs. This was a shift of emphasis from developing a network of cooperative support to focusing on the development of the conflict resolution programs. Two ideas emerged regarding school rules. At Brentwood, the Ambassadors were asked to develop a policy regarding the playing of Poggs. The students became committed to following the rules they developed. Other examples from the other two schools indicated that students were more willing to follow rules they developed themselves. At Saanichton, as a result of a study by our colleague, rules were put in affirmative rather than negative form. For

example 'Don't run in the halls' was replaced by 'Please walk in the halls'. We began to develop more student collaboration in setting school rules and to use affirmative discourse.

It became apparent that a key group to incorporate in our cooperative model was the playground supervisors. They were the people who had direct contact with the conflict managers and monitored the behavior of the students on the playground. The unclear situation was how to involve them in the collaboration network. At Brentwood the contact began with informal conversation among the playground supervisors and myself as program sponsor. This relationship was formalized in the next phase. How to involve playground supervisors and parents as collaborators became a question that the Educator as Researcher explored.

I increased the collaborative participation of students and playground supervisors at Brentwood School by holding monthly meetings to provide time for collaboration. The program coordinator at Lochside expanded the conflict resolution role of the conflict managers to peer helping where students were able to ask for help (Example – I need someone to help me practice my times tables) by putting up requests for help on a centrally located bulletin board.

My colleagues and I shared role play scenarios that we had found successful in our training programs. We maintained enthusiasm for the program by providing occasional external rewards. We increased parent involvement by inviting parents to meetings and by having them participate in the training. We increased awareness in the program through a poster campaign.

During the first phase, our focus was to foster collaboration among teachers and to identify key elements that had stimulated their desire to develop programs that would promote the use of conflict resolution skills taught in the Learning for Living Curriculum.

I and my colleagues reflected on our collaborative relationships. We were satisfied with the relationships we each had with our administrators. Our administrators actively supported the programs by helping arrange scheduling and by helping with other requests we made.

We felt that we had been able to expand the collaboration model in developing a collaborative relationship with playground supervisors and students.

My colleagues and I reflected on the collaborative relationship we had with each other. We found that it had been helpful to have set up regularly scheduled meetings. We found that we used this time to share ideas and help each other in solving problems. We found that although we had accepted that our colleague from Saanichton would be unable to attend some of the meeting due to previous commitments, her absence did affect the dynamics of the way we worked together. My initial contact with her had been helpful in the reinstitution of the program at Brentwood. However as the year progressed I depended more on the help from my colleague at Lochside.

One of the problems that we all faced was in finding the time to train the students. At Saanichton, schedules were changed so that the Saanichton

colleague could hold two afternoon training sessions in September. At Lochside, the students were selected in the spring and began the training in an apprenticeship program. The apprentices were then given a full day workshop in which the current conflict managers participated in the training. I decided to follow the Lochside model. I arranged to be an observer with a group of six conflict managers from Brentwood. I used this model the following year and plan to continue as well as expand parent involvement in the training.

The relationship we had with the learning for Living coordinator changed when she was officially assigned to our group as facilitator. She tried to get us to focus on an end product of our working together. We discussed the possibility of using the funds to set up a workshop. We were still unclear as to who our target audience should be. We discussed the possibility of preparing a handbook.

My colleagues and I felt that the programs were still too dependent on us as program coordinators.

We decided that we needed to contact other schools who had similar programs in place or who may be interested in initiating similar programs. We decided that we needed to cultivate more active support from our own staffs. To this end, we developed a list of people in our district who, we thought, might be interested in collaborating with us. This list included teachers from our own schools, teachers from other schools, an administrator who had initiated a peer-helper program, and school counselors. We were still unclear as to the purpose of the contact. We considered inviting those on

our list to a meeting to share ideas. We considered finding out from them, if there was interest in a workshop.

Informal contacts were made with some of the people on our list. but it was not until the next phase that some of these people became part of our expanding network.

We reflected on what we had achieved in the development of our conflict manager programs. We all experienced frustration in finding time to debrief students when they came in from the playground. We felt that it would be ideal to have daily debriefing sessions. Lochside had bimonthly meetings, Brentwood had monthly meetings and Saanichton had no set schedule.

We were unclear as to how much training in conflict resolution the students were getting in the classroom and we were experiencing frustration in trying to provide training ourselves.

We were not in agreement as to the process of selecting students. My colleagues used processes that included peer nomination, teacher nomination. and self nomination. They expected the conflict managers to be good models. I used self-nomination and peer-nomination. I accepted all who applied into the program. I also recruited those students who had been selected by other students, but did not nominate themselves. I also recruited native students who, I felt, would enrich the program, as well as 'at risk' students who I felt would benefit from the training and extra supervision.

We were unclear as to whether our programs actually made our playgrounds more peaceful.

Toward the end of the school year, we found that we had to cancel some meetings because of conflicts with our other commitments in our schools. We also found that we were becoming less productive at these after school meetings. We found it unproductive to try to evaluate, clarify, and develop new strategies at the end of a school day when our energy was low and there had not been time for reflection. The role of coordinator of our school conflict manager programs was taking its toll, with too many missed lunch hours and too many before and after school meetings.

We decided that the responsibility for the continuation and enhancement of the programs designed to practice conflict resolution skills needed to be a responsibility that the whole school shared. How this was to develop is explored in the next phase.

CHAPTER 4 EXPANDING COLLABORATION

INTRODUCTION

I and my colleagues had established a collaborative relationship. We now needed to continue to develop a collaborative relationship with the students. We needed to continue a collaborative relationship with the playground supervisors. We needed to find ways to include other staff and parents in the action research spiral. We needed to consider the relationship we planned to develop with other people that shared our interest. I needed to evaluate the development of the Ambassador Program at Brentwood School.

THE EXPANDING CIRCLE

I wanted to develop a collaborative relationship with the playground supervisors and students by providing a forum for playground supervisors and student Ambassadors to bring problems and concerns forward in order to find solutions and to improve the program. Students began to become more involved in defining and clarifying school rules.

The following is an example of how playground supervisors and students became part of the collaboration network through monthly meetings, as well as an example of the role of publicity in supporting the program:

At Brentwood school, my initial contact will playground supervisors was informal. In response to my question about the training they had received, I found that there had been a training workshop offered by the district when the program was first instituted in 1992 as a result of contract negotiations in which teachers got the right to duty free lunch hours. At that time, the position of lunch time supervisor was developed. The district eventually offered training for this position. The supervisors had been paid to attend the first session but following sessions were scheduled for them to attend on their own time. This had become an issue for some of the playground supervisors. It was in this atmosphere that I asked the playground supervisors to give their own time to attend meetings which were scheduled just before lunch hour during time that I was being paid for but they were not. The meetings began with lessons on conflict resolution skills. The attendance of the supervisors was a way to inform them as to what skills the students were working on so that they could support their learning. Eventually the time for supervisors and students to bring forth actual problems from the playground was expanded.. The result was that the playground supervisors and students began to have more control of the meetings. By the end of the year, all of the supervisors had attended at least one of the meetings. Generally two or three of the six supervisors were present at each meeting during the year. After this link was established an article was published in the school newsletter:

PLAYGROUND SUPERVISORS HELP IN TRAINING STUDENTS FOR THE AMBASSADOR PROGRAM AT BRENTWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

The Ambassador Program trains students so that they can serve their school by helping other students resolve conflicts. The Ambassadors work in pairs. When they are on duty, Ambassadors assist disputing students in the peaceful resolution of their conflicts by using a prescribed problem-solving process.

The process is voluntary. Students in conflict are encouraged to use Ambassadors as facilitators in helping them to express their conflicts in appropriate ways and to find their own best resolutions. If the disputing students agree, The Ambassadors work through the process with them. If the disputing students don't agree, the Ambassadors will inform the playground supervisors of the dispute.

The playground supervisors are concerned members of the community. They are also parents of children in the school. Their concern is expressed in the caring and compassion for all of the children in the school. They usually supervise the primary area. They help kids as they learn how to play together. One supervisor is especially appreciated by the intermediate students. He can be found on the soccer field organizing games and teaching kids about fair play. Another supervisor didn't know that climbing on to roofs was in his job description but when he is not getting kids safely across the street or helping kids sort things out, he may be found on the roof retrieving balls.

The playground supervisors help to foster a safe and happy playtime on the playground. They are using their training and experience to help train the Ambassadors. They may, sometimes, refer students in conflict to the Ambassadors and will provide assistance, if needed, in getting to a resolution."
(Brentwood School Newsletter, February, 1995)

This publicity helped to acknowledge the supporting role of the playground supervisors in the development of the program. It also helped to foster the collaborative link. The playground supervisors became more committed to attending the monthly meetings.

The agenda for the meetings was based on input from the student Ambassadors, the playground supervisors and the teacher sponsor. Following are examples of agendas during the school year 1994-95:

AMBASSADOR SUPPORT GROUP MEETING AGENDA

DATE: December 7, 1994
TIME: 11:00 A.M.
PLACE: Library

1. PUBLICITY
A. Parent newsletter: It was announced that an article entitled, "PLAYGROUND SUPERVISORS HELP IN TRAINING STUDENTS FOR THE AMBASSADOR PROGRAM AT BRENTWOOD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL" would appear in the next parent newsletter.

B. School bulletin board: It was announced that a school bulletin board located in the front hall was designated for Ambassador news. Here, you can find out who is on duty each day.

C. Newspaper - THE REVIEW : Reporter, from the **Peninsula News Review** sat in on the meeting in order to prepare for an article to be published next Wednesday. She took some pictures of Ambassadors at work.

D. Other: Other suggestions for publicity were:
1. Other newspapers
2. Ambassador Newsletter
3. T.V.
4. Making presentations to other classes.
5. Video of Ambassadors at work

2. CONCERNS ARISING FROM THE FIRST MONTH'S EXPERIENCE
A. Confidentiality: Ambassadors were given a definition of confidentiality. Ambassadors were told that when reporting in they should only report on what they heard, saw, and did. It is inappropriate to report "hearsay".

B. Designated Areas: A discussion of the designated areas indicated that there was some confusion. This has resulted partly due to exceptions that have been made based on a rationale (common sense). For example, a teacher with a Grade 3-4 split has requested that these children be able to play together.

Exceptions are sometimes made for children with special needs or special reasons. It was decided that children can ask the supervisors for special permission. It was also pointed out that supervisors should be careful not to grant too many exceptions as it may result in one area of the playground becoming too congested.

The discussion of designated areas led to a discussion of playground equipment. Some children discussed problems of safety. The question of accessibility was also raised. "Why can't we play on the primary climbing apparatus?" "Why can't kids who can handle it play on the intermediate equipment?"

It was decided that a committee of supervisors and students would prepare some solutions to the problems of designated areas and safety and access to equipment. The committee meeting will be announced so that any other supervisor or student may attend.

C. Unclear directions (Example: "Send him to the principal) Supervisors should try to monitor the directions they give to the Ambassadors. Ambassadors were reminded that they are not to get physical with other students. If they cannot stop a fight with their presence, or with words they are to get a supervisor.

3. ITEMS FOR NEXT MONTH'S AGENDA
If you have anything you would like to discuss at next month's meeting, please let me know or leave a message in my box

The first meeting provided for the action of collaboration that had been planned. The meeting was scheduled in the forty-five minutes before lunch so as to make it easier for the playground supervisors to attend. Four playground supervisors and a parent representative from the PAC. attended this meeting.

In action research, "To act then, is to demonstrate in concrete ways what one thinks is important enough to do; action becomes a representation of one's desire so to speak. "(Sumara, 1989:13) This meeting confirmed that the playground supervisors did have an interest in becoming more involved in

the program. It also confirmed that publicity of making our work known was important. The article was published in the local newspaper. this helped to increase awareness of the program in the community. The meeting also provided an arena for problem solving and improving the program.

AMBASSADOR SUPPORT GROUP MEETING AGENDA

February 8, 1995
11: 00 A.M.
Library

1. Minutes from meeting of January 11, 1994

2. Report from the committee on playground safety concerning play ground equipment.

3. Publicity : Making presentations to other classes
   Publicity: Contact with Times Colonist , Monday Magazine, B.C.T.F., These are possibilities.
   Publicity: Discussion with Grade 5 teachers as a possible topic for a writing assignment.

4. Concerns arising from last month's experience.

A. Designated areas. A split class requested and was granted permission that the class be allowed to play in the primary area under the following conditions: They are not to play on the primary equipment. They should move to the intermediate area if they wish to play a game among themselves involving running or balls etc.

B. Designated areas; COMMITTEE REPORT.

C. Sending students to the principal for discipline. Clarification is needed

D. Students are encouraged to play with others on duty.

5. Discussion of problem of time for debriefing.

6. Development of schedule for who is where on the playground....

This agenda indicates that we were still dealing with many of the same issues three months later. The suggestion for more publicity came from the students. The presentation to other classrooms was well relieved by the teachers and other students. It was not until the following year that I was successful in getting an article published in the "Times Colonist" (Victoria's major metropolitan newspaper) and "Parent Magazine" (a Vancouver Island publication). The students were especially excited about T.V. coverage. It took two years for this idea to develop into a project. The project is still underway. I am presently working with Shaw Cable to complete a 30 minute documentary to be aired nationally.

We were still clarifying the question of designated areas and the question of when and how it was appropriate to involve the administration in discipline problems.

We were clarifying the role of the Ambassadors. We found that they were helpful in identifying problems of safety on the playground. A committee was set up to deal with safety issues. The committee included a playground supervisor and four students.

Our meetings reflected the action research model of clarifying, developing action strategies, putting them into practice, and making the knowledge public.

Continuing the Action Research

I continued to meet with my colleagues as a member of the Educator as Researcher team. In January and February we were all focusing on our individual programs. We shared ideas on how to improve the school programs.

I shared the problem with Poggs as reported by Ambassadors at Brentwood which led to them developing a set of rules which became school policy. This led to the discussion on how schools' rules were more effective when developed by the students themselves.

My colleagues from Lochside and Saanichton shared their ideas on the use of Gotcha tickets (Getting caught doing something good) currently being employed at their schools. I decided to employ this positive reinforcement technique at Brentwood.

I was piloting materials on developing conflict resolution skills at Brentwood. These materials were reviewed by the consultant, purchased by the district and made available to the district via the District Resource Center.

We were also informed by our facilitator that the Learning for Living curriculum was currently being rewritten as a Personal Planning Integrated Resource Program. This program was to be implemented the next school year and had a conflict resolution component that would support our programs.

After the meeting , I decided to implement the Gotcha tickets at Brentwood School. The student Ambassadors began to complain of boredom. They cited lack of conflicts as a reason. The Ambassadors and the playground supervisors reported that according to their observations the students were beginning to use the conflict resolution model themselves. The Ambassadors and supervisors also reported that they were spending less time monitoring safety rules. The Gotcha program was initiated as a way to expand the job description of the Ambassadors to give them practice in identifying positive acts and in giving them the role of giving positive reinforcement to students for these acts. The playground supervisors were also included in the Gotcha program to act as models for the Ambassadors. The following article about the Gotcha program was placed in the school newsletter:

CONGRATULATIONS TO STUDENTS THAT HAVE RECEIVED GOTCHA'S

What is a "GOTCHA"? A GOTCHA is a certificate of recognition for helping to make our playground a safe and fun place to be. The supervisors and ambassadors hand out these certificates to children they observe doing the following:

- Playing fair in a game
- Playing nicely with others
- Helping others
- Being kind to others

Ambassadors are not allowed to give certificates to children who ask for them. Gotchas are for kids that get caught doing something positive. Although the ambassadors don't catch everyone in the act of being positive they do catch some kids. Each week, GOTCHAS are given out. At the end of each week, those names are put in a draw and one student is randomly "caught" and held up as an example to the others. This student's name is announced in the morning announcements, posted on a bulletin board, and mentioned in the parent newsletter.

The following students have been caught: ...
Congratulations to all those who have been caught so far. You may be caught when you least expect it. Word has it that even if you are not caught, helping to make the playground safe and fun feels good.

The reason for randomly choosing one student each week for recognition is that many of the positive acts were not caught. The Ambassadors suggested the random draw as a fair way to choose someone for recognition.

The Educator as Researcher team met again in March. We discussed the research question with the aim of formulating a plan. Most of the time was spent discussing the problem of time. Holding these meetings at the end of a full school day was not optimally productive. We were all arriving at the meeting too tired. Since we were still no further ahead in redefining our research question, We made a decision to request that the money be held over to the 1995-96 school year and that the money be used for a workshop for teachers interested in our programs.

We then continued to discuss the collaboration network. We had taken steps to involve playground supervisors, and students in the development of the programs. We had plans to involve parents in the training. We had also planned to get the community involved in the program. We decided that the first step was to inform our communities that our school population was concerned about violence. I told my colleagues about the poster campaign I had initiated at Brentwood School as a way of making our school culture aware of our concern about violence. This led to a decision to use a poster campaign to link the school with the community.

At Brentwood, I had the students make posters that showed how students react positively with one another by focusing on mutual respect and conflict prevention. I had the students ask local merchants or family businesses to have the posters displayed. I also, announced the location of posters in the

school newsletter. The following article appeared in the school newspaper.

LINKING THE SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

The Grade 5 class in the L.A. classroom made posters on the theme of non-violent ways to resolve conflict. This is a theme in the "Learning for Living" program. The students took the initiative to place their own posters in the following places:

Student - Department of National Defense Fire Hall
Student - Mom's Health Station
Student - Associated Physicians in Sidney
Student - Dad's photography studio
Student - Geography Department , University of Victoria
Student - Brentwood Coiffures
Student - Your Community Law Firm
Student - Fairfield Health Center
Student - Douglas Building, Victoria
Student - Brentwood School bulletin board
Student - North Saanich School"

In April, we held another team meeting. The team found a need to evaluate what they had done and where they were going. The team members expressed a frustration about shortage of time: time to continue to train and debrief the students and time to meet. (The March meeting was rescheduled three times because of conflicts of other school related meetings). The team found it unproductive to try to evaluate, clarify and develop new strategies at the end of a school day when energy was low and there had not been time for reflection. We felt the need for some release time for coordinators of the program. We talked about possible internal arrangements. We felt that this did not provide an adequate solution. We reflected on the commitment of the individual schools and the school district to these programs. Is the amount of money allocated to a program an indication of interest and support? It seemed that there was a correlation between the program,

whether it be music, sports, or fine arts etc., and the budget allocated. We needed to pursue this question further. The assumption at this time was that the continuation and enhancement of the programs designed to practice conflict resolution skills depended on the commitment of time and money.

We reflected back to the initial phase of the action research project. We had been granted money for release time but had not used it. In was only in a reflection phase in the second year that we concluded that our frustration about time and money in the first year was because of our own lack of reflection. It was our own unwillingness to change the system of meeting that we had set up initially. We had been reluctant to use the funds in the first year because we had still not defined our project in a way that would benefit the district. We continued to meet on our own time after school even when we found that these meetings were becoming less productive.

In the spring of 1994, I and my colleagues had asked for an extension for our Educator as Researcher project. Our request was granted and our grant was carried over.

We needed to decide on how we planned to make our work known. We were still considering the possibility of publishing a handbook on how to set up a conflict manager program in elementary schools or of holding a workshop but we were still unclear as to our target audience.

In May and June, we were busy planning a training program for the Grade 4 students. Apprenticeship programs were put in place. We worked with the Grade 5 students and made presentations in Grade 4 classrooms and at school

assemblies. Lochside school planned a whole day workshop in June that would include Grade 4 and 5 students as well as parents. I requested and was granted permission to bring a team of six students as observers.

A response to the memo dated May 8, 1995, received from the Educator as Researcher: Teacher Interaction Committee was formulated. We needed to provide the committee with a report on the progress of our project, and our request for more time. A draft was sent on May 15, 1995. Its text was as follows:

EDUCATOR AS RESEARCHER

To: The Educator as Researcher : Teacher Interaction Core Committee

From: Educator as Researcher Team,

Date: May 15, 1995

Subject: Letter of Intent

This letter is in response to the information provided in the document, WHAT IT IS ALL ABOUT. This document states that "Research should be completed during the current school year but could be of longer duration if the project requires it. If more time is needed, a letter of intent must be submitted to the committee prior to May 30 funding cut off date."

Our team feels that more time is needed. We ask that our funds be carried over to the school year, 1995-96.

Reasons for the request for an extension:

One of the team members had returned from an educational leave and was unfamiliar with the Educator as Researcher model as well as the Peacekeeper, Peacemaker, and Ambassador initiatives. This team member has now gained experience in developing an Ambassador program and is now more familiar with the Educator as Researcher model.

The application was not sent until November 16, 1994 because of the reasons stated above. The team was late in starting and thus, has had less time.

The nature of the project and the type of research requires more time. This is more fully explained in the team report .

We thank you for your consideration and the support we have received.

A SENSE OF DIRECTION

The team was granted an extension for a second year as an Educator as Researcher project. We got together and made plans for the next school year.

My colleagues and I agreed that the scheduled monthly meetings provided for the sharing of ideas which helped to support and enhance the programs at the three schools. We planned to continue this practice.

My colleagues and I decided that the setting up of monthly meetings with the playground supervisors and students in the program also helped to support and enhance the program. We planned to continue this practice.

My colleagues and I decided that informing parents through a presentation at a PAC meeting and the school newsletter was also helpful and should be continued. However, we decided that we would explore ways of getting more active parent involvement, such as more involvement in training students.

My colleagues and I felt that the success of the programs were still too dependent on us as coordinators of the programs. We felt that we had been successful in expanding the collaboration model to include playground supervisors and students. We felt that we needed to expand by involving other schools who had similar programs in place or who may be interested in initiating such programs or other teacher in our schools who may be interested in collaborating with us. To this end, we planned to invite those known to us to join us at our monthly meetings and to plan ways of informing others. In the end, we hoped that our network would include: trustees, administrators, sponsor teachers, other teaching staff, support staff, students, parents and the community.

We wanted to investigate further, the linkage between teaching conflict resolution skills in the curriculum area of personal planning, including the second step program, and the practicing of conflict resolution skills in the Peace keeper and Ambassador programs. The meetings with the coordinator had been helpful. We planned to continue to work closely with the Personal Planning coordinator. We also decided that we needed to find out how and to what extent, classroom teachers were using conflict resolution skills.

We were unclear as to how we were going to make our work public. We planned to invite those known to us to join us at our monthly Educator as Researcher meetings and to plan ways to inform others. We still considered presenting a workshop. We planned to continue to make our activities known through school newsletters. We planned to have articles published in local newspapers and magazines. We planned to pursue the possibility of T.V. coverage of our programs. We planned to offer to make presentations to

the trustees and to our local PAC'S. We planned to invite parents to our meetings with students and playground supervisors.

The monthly meetings of the Educator as Researcher team had provided a forum for collaboration among the three schools. The Educator as Researcher project also provided a link of cooperation with the School district. The Educator as Researcher committee provided a forum for presentations of projects in October, 1995. Our team used this forum to make our work known to other interested teachers and administrators.

As earlier noted in the report of the April report on the Educator as Researcher meeting, we had experienced a problem with time and our own reluctance to use the money we had been allocated as release time for us to meet.

We discussed the problem of time in the training of students and maintaining the program, We decided to ask for help from other staff members and to investigate the possibility of making internal arrangements in the schools that would provide release time to train and debrief students.

Strategies to help the Ambassadors

The training of student Ambassadors continued throughout the year.

The development of skills was linked to the curriculum. The curriculum component, "Learning for Living" incorporated a "Second Step Program". This program dealt with empathy training. Students learned how to identify

and predict feelings of others, and provide an appropriate emotional response. the program also dealt with impulse control. Students learned skills in problem solving and conflict resolution, effective communication, and specific social behaviors and anger management. Students learned techniques to reduce stress and redirect angry feelings in order to prevent violent reactions.

The students were taught the following conflict resolution strategy through a video presentation developed at Brentwood school in 1992 followed by role play and finally, practice on the playground. This strategy was taken from Davis, (Davis, et al., 1986).

Strategy:

Encourage students to use the Conflict Resolution Model
If students agree to accept help from the ambassadors, here are the ground rules:

1. One person talks at a time.
2. Speak respectfully. (No blaming, name calling or put-downs.)
3. Listen actively.
4. Brainstorm solutions.
5. Choose a solution.

End with: Give it a try and let us know how it works out.

Students had difficulty in using this strategy because they often spent unproductive time trying to find out what the "true" story was.
To help the students we developed role plays on reporting. These exercises demonstrated that people could observe or experience the same event, and in incorporating their background of knowledge with the event, generate differing reports. The students found that spending time on trying to get the true story was not productive but that focusing on a student's need to be

heard was more helpful in being able to move on to finding a solution to the conflict.

The following strategy, active listening, proved helpful:

> Strategy: Encourage students to use active listening.
>
> Active listening guidelines:
>
> 1. Put yourself in the other person's place to understand what the person is saying and how the other person feels.
>
> 2. Show understanding and acceptance by nonverbal behavior: facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture.
>
> 3. Restate the other person's most important thoughts and feelings.
>
> 4. Do not interrupt, offer advice, or give suggestions. Do not bring up similar feelings and problems from your own experience.
>
> All of these can help the speaker feel more comfortable so that the speaker will want to keep talking to you.
>
> Find a good time and place to talk: try to stay calm, state the problem as you see it, listen to the other person without interrupting, try to empathize with each speaker's point of view, move on to problem-solving (Davis, et al., 1990: 5-22).

Students found that the strategy of using their wits was helpful.

> Strategy: Encourage students to use their W.I.T.S
>
> W - Walk away from trouble.
> I - Ignore confrontation.
> T - Talk to an Ambassador.
> S - Supervisors can intervene.

At a focus group including students, playground supervisors, and a school counselor, the strategies were discussed. The strategy most often used by both students and playground supervisors was WITS. Some students still had difficulty with the conflict resolution model, and the difference between 'hearing' both sides and getting the 'true' story. Another observation was that they often preferred not to brainstorm solutions. They relied on quick and simple strategies (like picking a number to decide turns).

EVALUATION USING SURVEYS

Part of the concept of triangulation is to find a variety of perspectives from which the results of the action research may be evaluated for further reflection. Three surveys were conducted and analyzed as part of this triangulation process.

Survey for Potential Ambassadors

This survey was conducted in the spring of 1995 to Grade 4 students who were interested in becoming Grade 5 Ambassadors for the school year 1994 - 95. The purpose of the survey was to cause the students to reflect on how they dealt with conflicts. Three grade 4 classes were surveyed. The results are presented in Table 1.

Analysis of the survey

Since the students were acting as collaborative participants in action research, they were invited to comment on, and clarify the results of the survey. In class discussions with the students following the survey and its tabulation, the following points came out.

TABLE 1

SURVEY FOR POTENTIAL AMBASSADORS

How I Respond to Conflicts

When there is a conflict, I try to:

Question	Always	Some-times	Never
1. hit the other person	0	18	63
2. run away	2	28	48
3. get help	9	52	17
4. talk it out	47	20	10
5. ignore it	5	37	36
6. understand the other point of view	39	30	9
7. make a joke of it	5	17	56
8. get help from a grown up	13	60	4
9. make the other kid apologize	19	34	25
10. apologize myself	26	45	6
11. find out what the problem is	56	20	2
12. listen to the other kid	52	21	5
13. tell the kid to leave me alone	13	45	20
14. say swear words	0	13	64
15. get friends to gang up on the other kid.	2	8	67

The idea of solving a conflict by physical force was not acceptable to the students but they needed help in anger management. The concept of 'running away' was associated with being a coward; however, 'Walking away' was an acceptable possibility of ending a conflict. 'Ignore it' had a similar connotation as 'run away'. To ignore was introduced as a strategy that might be affective especially when dealing with teasing or bullying.

The concept of 'getting help' had not been supported in the school culture. Teachers often referred to such requests as 'tattle-tale-ing'. The school culture needed to explore a change of attitude and to develop ways to ask for and receive help.

Most students are at ease in 'talking it out'. The school culture needed to find ways to support students who had difficulty verbalizing.

'Understand the other's point of view or listening to others' was not acceptable to those students that saw conflict as a win-lose situation. The students needed to explore win-win strategies.

The use of humor seemed to be too sophisticated for students of this age. Their experience was that 'being laughed at' was painful.

The students felt that apologies should not be given unless they were sincere.

Students understood that swearing was unacceptable and was a question of anger management. The concept of verbal abuse needed to be explored.

The difference between a 'gang' and a support group needed to be explored.

Survey for Incumbent Ambassadors

Concurrently, this survey was conducted in the spring of 1995 with the then current group of student ambassadors in order to find out if being an ambassador produced different attitudes toward conflict resolution, and to get feedback on the program. The results are presented in Table 2.

Analysis of the Survey

Most students, (26 of 30) believe that conflicts are a part of everyday life. The majority of students (25 of 30) felt that with the help of conflict resolution skills, they were able to work out conflicts when playing with friends. The majority of students, (24 of 30) felt that conflict resolution skills were useful in the classroom. Slightly more students (27 of 30) felt that conflict resolution skills were useful in helping to reduce physical violence on the playground and slightly less useful in dealing with verbal violence (24 of 30). Most students (25 of 30) felt that all students in the school should learn conflict resolution skills.

Half of the students felt that the same skills were useful in dealing with conflicts in the home. This was not surprising considering that the parent involvement (and connection with the home) was not really developed until the following year of the program. (In subsequent years, parents became moreinvolved as collaborators, and the same strategies were echoed in the home.)

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF SURVEY OF GRADE 5 AMBASSADORS, SPRING 1995
(survey based on - Knight, 1994)

Rating scale:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know No Opinion
1	2	3	4	5	DK

QUESTION OR QUESTION CATEGORY	1's	2's	3's	4's	5's	DK
Conflict Resolution						
1. Conflicts are a part of everyday life.	8	18	1	2	1	0
2. Conflict resolution skills help me to work out conflicts when I'm playing with friends.	9	16	0	3	2	0
3. I use conflict resolution skills in the classroom.	2	22	4	0	2	0
4. Conflict resolution skills help to reduce physical violence on the playground.	16	11	0	1	2	0
5. Conflict resolution skills help to reduce verbal violence on the playground.	16	8	0	1	3	2
6. I think all students in the school should learn conflict resolution skills.	15	10	1	0	2	2
7. I find mediation strategies helpful at home in conflicts with my family.	5	10	7	6	2	0
Ambassador Training						
8. I like being an Ambassador.	12	12	1	3	2	0
9. Role - playing situations helped me to learn mediation skills.	12	9	2	5	2	0
10. I think the green jackets are a good way to identify Ambassadors.	19	6	1	2	2	0
11. I found the training classes interesting.	5	15	2	5	2	1
12. I need more training.	3	3	3	6	14	1
13. I have helped others to work out agreeable solutions.	15	12	3	0	1	0
14. Students come to Ambassadors instead of Supervisors.	11	11	5	2	0	1
15. Students see Ambassadors as helpers.	1	4	5	8	9	3

Only half of the students felt that all students in the school should learn conflict resolution skills. The only explanations I can put forward are that the Ambassadors felt themselves to be in a senior role and felt that these skills would be too difficult for the younger students to apply without their help.

However, by the very process of being ambassadors they were modeling and imparting conflict resolution skills to the entire student population.

Most of the students enjoyed their role as Ambassadors. Also, most of the students thought that the green jackets were a good way to identify Ambassadors on the playground. The jackets were new this year and replaced the yellow banners. I expect that the jackets won't be as popular next year. There is already a problem of wearing jackets during the warm spring weather.

Role-playing helped most students in learning conflict resolution skills. However a significant number did not find role-playing helpful. Better debriefing after role-play situations is needed. Most students found the training interesting.

A significant number did not find the training interesting. Since the training involved a lot of role-play, better debriefing is necessary. Only a few students (6) felt the necessity for more training. Training needed to be improved so that role-play would be seen as relevant to the job. More of a variety of training methods such as videos and sharing sessions needed to be used.

Most of the Ambassadors felt that they helped other students work out agreeable solutions to their problems. Most of the Ambassadors felt that the students came to them for help instead of going to supervisors. The students who did not feel this way may not have been as approachable. Only a few Ambassadors (5) felt that the other students saw them as helpers.

The difficulty was in defining the role of Ambassador. In the first lesson, the role was defined as a helper. Their role was not to solve problems but to act as a facilitator in helping others to solve their own problems.

In practice, when other students couldn't find a solution or seemed to take too long to find a solution, the Ambassador would provide a solution and ask the students to agree to give it a try and report back.

The Ambassadors were also asked to develop and help enforce school policies. When playing Poggs became a problem, the Ambassadors developed and helped enforce a policy so that the school did not find it necessary to ban Poggs as happened in other schools.

The Ambassadors were also asked to help enforce school safety rules. They were suppose to politely remind a student of the safety rule, and if the student chose not to heed the reminder, the Ambassador was to inform a supervisor. In practice, the Ambassadors found this system cumbersome as supervisors were not always readily available and so found it easier to enforce the rule themselves.

It should be noted that two students put negative responses throughout the questionnaire. This was probably due to a problem that developed at the time of the questionnaire.

Of the two, one student informed me that he was dropping out of the Ambassador program. The other was his best friend who was being supportive.

I informed the student who wanted to drop out that this was not an option since I had stated that in order to become an Ambassador one had to make a full year commitment. The job of being an Ambassador was like any job in that under the agreement the students had to be on time, fulfill their duties, be a model and find a replacement if they wished to participate in another school activity. The contract could only be broken with the mutual consent of the program supervisor (myself), the parents and the student.

I contacted the parents of the student requesting termination of his contract. The student, his mother and I met to discuss this request. The student stated that he was beginning to find the job boring and that he would rather play soccer. It was agreed that it was important job training for him to fulfill his commitment. Since he could play soccer 4 out of 5 days, and since this was his main interest at that time, it was suggested that on his duty day, he could organize a soccer game for the younger students.

The student did fulfill his commitment and did help to organize sports activities on the playground. At the end of the year, he felt that fulfilling his commitment was a good decision.

Focus Groups

To better understand the results of the survey, I conducted focus groups among the Ambassadors. The first session involved all the Ambassadors working in groups of six to eight. The second session involved about ten ambassadors, the school counselor, a playground supervisor, a special needs teacher, a parent, and myself. The results brought particular concerns forward.

A factor which may explain why students felt that conflict resolution skills were slightly more effective in dealing with physical violence rather that verbal violence (verbal abuse) is that they themselves were less apt to settle disputes with physical violence. In the fall a few fights had been reported to the program supervisor. No fights had been reported in the two months proceeding the survey. However their had been an increase in reports of verbal abuse and teasing. They were experiencing more verbal abuse and felt less equipped to deal with it.

The verbal abuse and teasing centered around sexuality, for example: being called gay or lesbian, being teased about physical development like wearing a bra or having facial hair, or being someone's boyfriend or girlfriend. Also, cliques were beginning to form.

This was discussed at the action research meeting. I was informed by colleague from Saanichton that the school counselor had a video presentation available on teasing. Accordingly, a plan and action were formulated. I contacted the school counselor from Brentwood, and she

offered to make presentations in the classrooms, which appeared to help the situation.

Results of the Playground Supervisor Survey

In addition to the survey of the prospective and incumbent ambassadors, a survey of the playground supervisors and their attitudes to the ambassador program was also conducted. The results are shown in Table 3.

Summary of survey results

Since the surveys and the triangulation they provide directly feedback on the action research question, it is worthwhile reflecting on some of the implications of the results. The primary action research question was *How can a conflict manager program be implemented as a collaborative effort?*

The surveys do directly answer this question at all (the action research does), but the act of surveying as part of the action research increases collaborative input.

The surveys do indicate the relative success of the research. The playground supervisors see improvements in the playground (fewer conflicts). There is a marked difference in the attitudes toward conflict and conflict resolution between the candidates for Ambassadors, and those who have actually been through the program.

TABLE 3
TABULATED RESPONSES
OF
PLAYGROUND SUPERVISOR SURVEY

Results of Survey, Spring 1995 - (5 playground supervisors responded.)

1. **How does the Ambassador program affect you?**
   - It makes my job easier.
   - We all work as a team.
   - It gives me more time to deal with the more serious situations.
   - Confirms my belief that this type of program works.
   - Demonstrates that the school is committed to providing a safe environment for students.
2. **How do you handle conflict on the playground?**
   - I get the parties involved together and sort it out i.e.. listen to their stories, let them explain their feelings to each other and try to help them come up with some solutions and agree on a solution to resolve the problem. (5)
3. **Have you been trained in conflict resolution?**
   - Yes, through parent introduction to "Second Step Program" (2)
   - Feel that the best training is on the job and the skills I have as a parent. (3)
4. **Are there any role conflicts between you and the student Ambassadors?**
   - No. Sometimes have to remind students that they are models.
5. **Have there been any changes in the number of physical or verbal conflicts on the playground?**
   - Yes, fewer conflicts due to the program and presence of Ambassadors. (3)
   - Did not notice a decrease in incidents but did notice an increase in the awareness of how they should have handled the issue but still needed adult intervention to help them through the steps. (1)
   - Did not notice a decrease in incidents. (1)
6. **Do you spend more or less time dealing with conflicts on the playground?**
   - Less time, the Ambassadors deal with conflicts as well. (2)
   - Less time dealing with "bickering " and more time for more complex problems. (2)
   - Same as above but feel that I am often dealing with the same kids who are in conflict on different issues. More information on these students would be helpful. (1)
7. **Do you feel any loss of power or authority?**
   - No, I think the Ambassadors look up to us as responsible adults. (4)
   - Hey, nobody told me I had power and authority. (1)

TABLE 3
TABULATED RESPONSES
OF
PLAYGROUND SUPERVISOR SURVEY
(continued)

8. **Do you refer conflicts to the Ambassadors?**
   - Yes, I think it is good experience for them – learning comes through practice. (1)
   - Yes, They know the game rules, and recent announcements concerning the playground . (1)
   - Yes, when I am dealing with a serious problem, I tell students to find an Ambassador. (1)
   - Yes, when I think it is a problem that they can handle. (2)
9. **What do you see as the major problem of the Ambassador program at this time?**
   - How can the values of the program reach all students? (2)
   - What will insure that the program will continue? (1)
   - Program doesn't deal with kids prone to violent behavior. (1)
   - "Gotcha's" not handed out fairly. (1)
10. **What do you see as the major benefits of the Ambassador program?**
   - The younger kids feel more comfortable with the bigger kids. (1)
   - The younger kids see the bigger kids as helpers. (1)
   - It allows more time for the supervisors to deal with more serious situations. (2)
   - The Ambassadors are good role models. Even kids who are not Ambassadors are versed in the skills. I've seen kids working out conflicts without assistance. (1)

LINKING TO THE CURRICULUM

As part of the collaboration, I had arranged to teach the "Second Step" component of the Grade 5 Learning for Living (Personal Planning as of September 1995) curriculum. In these lessons the students began to develop strategies to deal with teasing and name calling.

The strategy WITS proved effective: W = Walk away, I = Ignore, T = Tell another Ambassador (in order to tell your story and get support), S = Go to a Supervisor (in order to get adult intervention).

Other lessons provided opportunities for role-playing, discussing feelings, and practicing being assertive versus being aggressive.

The discussions about cliques led to differentiating between a group and a gang. This proved problematic because the term gang was used in practice to describe a group of friends. The following definitions were developed:

A gang:

The leader is self appointed and is based on power and a challenge to the leadership results in a power struggle. Membership is earned and exclusive. Conformity is expected

The purpose of a gang is to be hurtful. It is hurtful to others to be excluded. A gang often chooses socially unacceptable ways to have fun, often by using power to terrorize or intimidate others.

Gangs have a negative effect on a community. Their exclusiveness often

separates them from community goals and results in antisocial behavior such as being destructive to community property and graffiti.

A group:

The leadership is flexible depending on the activity and the strengths of the individuals and or is shared. Membership is enjoyed and open. Individual strengths are shared and enjoyed, and weaknesses accepted

The purpose of a group is to be helpful. Members support each other and often have fun by getting together to help others.

Groups have a positive effect on the community. Their flexibility and openness fosters integration with community goals.

Based on the definitions, the cliques that were forming identified themselves with groups but called themselves gangs. "My gang" meant my group of friends.

In the 1995-96 school year we began to use the strategy, "Circle of Friends" to help others. It may be clearer to differentiate between a circle of friends and a gang.

The cliques had difficulty in maintaining flexibility and openness. Exclusion was often based on lack of trust (cannot keep confidences) or lack of ability. (We like to... but she/he can't...) Exclusion was also based on identification (We are skaters, he is a nerd). This identification began to impose conformity. This was particularly obvious in dress codes.

Exclusion and conformity are areas that need to be addressed. For example, if an individual is excluded from the group because of lack of trust, how can the group maintain openness while maintaining its integrity and mutual support as a group? Students should be encouraged to brainstorm solutions to these kinds of problems.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

The Ambassadors made presentations to the Grade 4 classes. They did role plays using the conflict resolution model. They answered questions. One topic area which the Ambassadors were able to clarify for the Grade 4 students was that they were not to act as police officers, but instead as helpers.

The interested Grade 4 students signed up for an apprenticeship program. A letter was given to their parents:

> To Parents of Grade 4 students
>
> Your child will be asked to fill out a nomination form this week to name themselves and / or a classmate as a potential participate in the Ambassador Program at Brentwood Elementary School. You will then receive a consent form.
>
> Your child will be expected to participate in the training program , much of which will take place during lunch hour when your child will act as an apprentice. You can expect more information once plans are finalized. If you have any questions, please contact the school.

The response level was a little more than half of the available grade 4 students. This represented a significant increase in interest.

The apprenticeship program was an introduction. It allowed the existing Ambassadors to help in the training. Training was to be developed the following school year; on the job, in monthly meetings, through debriefing sessions, and in classrooms through the curriculum.

This increased response was an expected consequence of our planned action of increasing student collaboration.

In anticipation of increased collaborative activities, more planning was put into place. The apprenticeship program occurred in some form at all three schools. Efforts were made to access resources at the District Resource Center to allow for better distribution of materials. The coordinator for the Personal Planning program was asked to compile and distribute to the schools lists of available resources.

Further funding was granted to the Educator as Researcher team.

The following communication was sent to the superintendent at the District Office:

Subject: Request for permission to continue research in Saanich School District #63

Review:
During the school year 1994-95 my focus was:

"How can a collaboration network be set up in order to support the development of conflict resolution skills through program initiatives in elementary schools?"

Attached, is a copy of my report to the Saanich Educator as Researcher team.

In the report is a description of a collaboration /cooperation network as well as examples of how programs improved as a result.

Request for Permission:

Included in the report under the section, "The Direction That The Team's Work Is Headed From This Point" is a plan for further expansion of the collaboration/cooperation network.

My request is for permission to expand the collaboration and cooperation network during the school year 1995-96 so that by "having the time to talk with others who have similar interests" (Educator as Researcher, SD #63 document) we can ensure the continuation and improvement of our programs. In the document, "Collaboration and Cooperation - First Steps in Action Research" (Paper, University of Alberta , on file Educational Directions Saanich School District #63) I discussed my experience in the changing of attitudes toward collaboration and cooperation and the necessity to expand the network.

During the next year, another teacher joined the Educator as Researcher group. In one of our schools , the students who wanted to be in the program numbered around eighty. This number was unmanageable for one teacher-sponsor. At Brentwood School, the number of students had increased from thirty to forty. I asked for help and got commitment from an intern teacher to help in organizing the students and commitment from other teachers to

help in the training. We continued to meet monthly.

The research question became:

How can the Educator as Researcher group support and enhance conflict manager programs already in place in Saanich School District #63 as well as to foster new initiatives within the framework of an expanding collaborative and cooperative network?

The development of a handbook on how to develop a conflict manager program in an elementary school was part of our answer to that question. We also invited others to contact us and become part of our expanding network in developing interaction and support.

The following information appeared in the September school newsletter. Efforts to include parents in the collaborative process began immediately.

BRENTWOOD SCHOOL

Welcome to this year's AMBASSADORS. These students began training in May and June of their Grade 4 year. Some of them joined the apprenticeship program as part of their training. They will continue their on the job training with the help of debriefing sessions with the program sponsors, an intern teacher and the F.S.L. teacher. They will also attend meetings with the playground supervisors, interested parents and staff. Our first meeting is scheduled for October 4 at 11:00 A.M. in the school library. Please join us.

What does an ambassador do? Ambassadors work in teams and are assigned to specific areas of the playground. They act as "critical friends" in helping others in solving conflicts, peacefully. They remind others of school rules. They alert the playground supervisors when they need help in practicing their conflict resolution skills. They initiate games. They help to make our playground a safe and friendly place.

The program continued to grow.

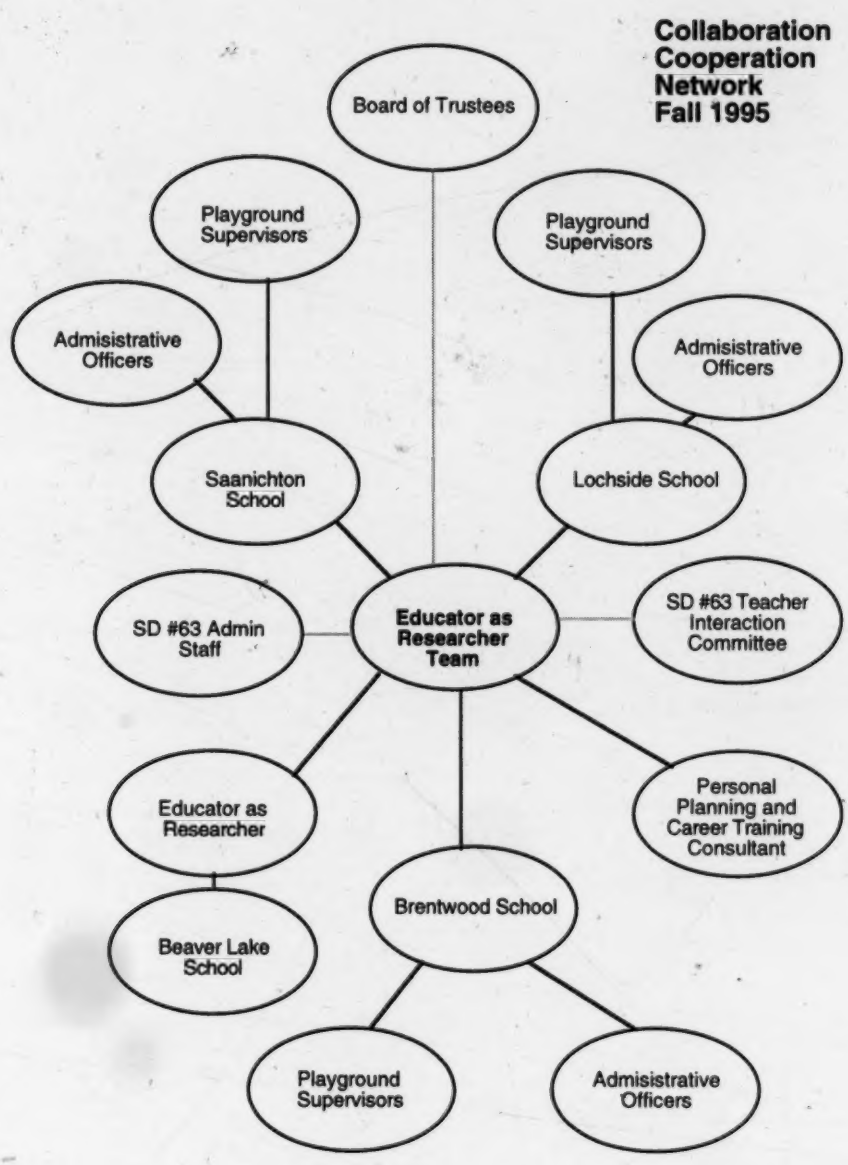
As my diagram of Fall 1994 depicts (Figure 1) the power structure has square edges and a linear flow of power and control downward to the educator-as-researcher. At that time my own feeling of control also included a side lobe flowing downward from the academic authority of my degree granting institution – the University of Alberta.

Over the course of the intervening time my efforts have included innumerable meetings, consultations and discussions both within and outside the conventional power structure.

Most of the time spent was used in developing the Ambassador program at Brentwood. Initially the time was spent in the training and supervising of students. I received support through scheduled monthly meetings with two other teachers who had similar programs in place at their schools through the district's educator-as-researcher program. A facilitator from the District office also attended many of these meetings. Parents, playground supervisors, other staff and administrators, and other stakeholders became increasing involved in learning about, and supporting the program.

As more levels of the traditional power structure became involved it became increasingly apparent to me what a useful tool humor was in diffusing and softening the edges and establishing a more cooperative environment.

FIGURE 2


Collaboration
Cooperation
Network
Fall 1995
Board of Trustees
Playground Supervisors
Playground Supervisors
Admisistrative Officers
Admisistrative Officers
Saanichton School
Lochside School
SD #63 Admin Staff
Educator as Researcher Team
SD #63 Teacher Interaction Committee
Educator as Researcher
Personal Planning and Career Training Consultant
Brentwood School
Beaver Lake School
Playground Supervisors
Admisistrative Officers

It became apparent that a key group to incorporate in our cooperative model were the playground supervisors. Monthly meetings involving playground supervisors and students proved fruitful. It is now apparent that this may be a good venue for parent involvement as well.

Similar meetings and developments occurred at all three schools involved in the program, so that by the fall of 1995 my Cooperation / Collaboration Network Diagram was quite different.

It appears as Figure 2. The edges were mostly gone. Contributions emanated from circles of interest. The effort was not top down but involved several interacting participating groups connected to the Educator-As-Researcher team.

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

In the fall of 1994, I returned to Saanich School District #63 with the intention of using an action research model to address the problem of violence in the schools. My starting point was to see if my concern about a perceived increase in youth violence was shared by others. In particular I wanted to understand how this was perceived as a district concern, and more particularly, a concern in the school where I had been reassigned after my return from my educational leave.

I had planned to get involved in the Ambassador Program because of my interest in conflict resolution. Conflict resolution, and how it might be locally applied was a research interest that supported my general interest in global or peace education.

As I progressed through the initial action research step of 'finding a starting point' it became increasingly clear that collaborative action research would provide a positive process consistent with the values I was trying to support. It also became clear that collaborative action research on the question: *How can a conflict manager program be implemented as a collaborative effort?* seemed to reflect the broad interests of many of the stakeholders, and had a real chance of making a positive impact.

The collaborative action research began with clarification of what was the perceived problem, and what were some perceived options to act. Initially, this meant forming a collaborative nucleus with two other teachers in the district. Then the collaboration grew, the District Educator as Researcher committee became involved. A facilitator from the District office became involved. The superintendent and the chairperson of the local School board, became involved. The school administrators became involved.

The network continued to expand and grow. Students were being actively trained in conflict resolution. They brought their problems to meetings with the program coordinators who were part of the collaborative nucleus. It seemed obvious that more involvement was necessary from the playground supervisors. They were invited to become involved. Parents became involved, and were invited to become more involved.

It became clear the development of the collaborative network was the foundation upon which the program's long term success depended. Other elements of collaborative action research became important. The issue of 'making teachers' work public' took on a new meaning in terms of expanding and solidifying the collaborative network. The use of media (newspapers, magazines, television) as well as other forums (posters in the windows of local merchants, newsletters, in-service professional development, the development of a handbook for broad distribution) became important in extending both the depth and the breadth of the collaborative network.

Preliminary triangulation from a number of sources encouraged, and supported, and redirected the work. There was a noticed decrease in physical violence on the playground. This was noticed by the students, the administrators, and the playground supervisors. There was a noticeable shift toward the implantation of conflict resolution processes as part of curriculum and school goals. There was increased participation throughout the collaborative network. There were individual stories of dramatic change where families had adopted the values of conflict resolution in place of previous violent practices.

More importantly, a structural change was taking place. The conflict manager program bridged over many hierarchical boundaries to involve participants from all levels and interest groups. The sharp edges between interest groups were softening as the collaborative process gained validity. Playground supervisors felt comfortable bringing problems and solutions forward as equals with other interested parties (like school administrators). Students brought forward problems and solutions. Parents collaborated, assisted, and listened to and understood the voices of other parties (including other parents). The conflict resolution model was gaining validity as it became applied on the playground, in the school, and even at home.

CONCLUSIONS

Collaboration (as noted by several authors) requires a greater investment of time and commitment. It requires greater personal commitment on the part of all participants since collaboration implies shared decision making, and shared decision making implies shared control.

One of my key findings is that collaboration is facilitated in situations where there is a common concern without a clear solution. In situations like the one I initially chose to investigate *'Violence in the Schools, Can a pro-active program of Conflict Management effect positive change?'* the answers are not clear, but the shared interest is. As a result of the shared interest, stakeholders are willing to come forward and offer both cooperative and collaborative support. With commitment on all sides, it is possible to move forward quickly, and effect positive change through the use of collaborative action research.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough the importance of collaboration. When there is a committed interest in finding solutions (a situation common in the educational settings) collaboration becomes possible. Collaborative action research is especially attractive, because all the stakeholders have the opportunity to share their reflections and concerns about the problems, their ideas for solutions, and to participate in the actions that put the solutions into effect.

I started out as one voice . When I sought collaboration, I discovered that there were many other voices, and we were all expressing the same concerns. As a direct result of this collaborative action research the whole school culture has changed.

In the spring of 1996 an External Accreditation Team mandated by the British Columbia Ministry of Education as part of their school by school accreditation process visited Brentwood Elementary School. Part of the External

Accreditation Team's report on Strengths in the Area of serving students intellectual development reads:

> "the 'Ambassador Program' provides students with opportunities to acquire and practice a variety of skills for lifelong learning such as conflict resolution and problem solving. The Team congratulates the staff and students of Brentwood for this initiative"(Aust et al., 1996).

At Brentwood School, the Ambassador program is now firmly entrenched. I was one of three chairpersons of the Internal Assessment Committee for the accreditation process. One of the purposes of the process was to develop a School Growth Plan. We were to develop a mission statement – a brief statement which would serve as the focus for all school initiatives. The mission statement was to state what we desired students to achieve. All school objectives were to support this direction. The entire school culture worked together in reworking and clarifying our mission statement. The Brentwood mission statement now reads as follows:

> "Brentwood School's goal is to foster a positive attitude toward life long learning. We aim to develop literacy, numeracy, and computer technology skills across the curriculum through the processes of Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making and Conflict Resolution" (Brentwood, 1996).

At the same time as we developed the mission statement, the school culture selected and developed three goals that would be our focus for the next five

years. Along with the goals we included strategies that our school will use to achieve them. The second goal is:

> "Use the processes of Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making, and Conflict Resolution, to support and sustain the acquisition and application of skills in Science, Math, Language Arts, and Social Studies.
>
> Strategies:
> - Share successful teaching practices of processes and strategies for teaching basic skills.
> - In service on the processes to support the acquisition and application of skills.
> - Identify common strategies used in the four strands"
>
> (Brentwood, 1996).

It is evident that the implementation of the conflict manager program as collaborative action research has achieved the goal of stabilizing and developing deep roots for the conflict manager program. The implementation of the conflict manager program is no longer the part-time of activity of a few teachers in the district. It has roots within the entire school culture, and the practice of the values underlying conflict resolution is becoming more broadly based.

The entire staff of another school in the district (not one of the original three) is presently working on collaborative action research to implement a conflict manager program in their school as part of the District's Educator as

Researcher Project. They have become part of the expanding collaborative network.

From the standpoint of the theory of action research, this particular program is a clear example of how collaborative action research is highly suited to positively address some of the most intractable and difficult problems. A problem like how to address *Violence in the Schools* is inherently difficult, and controversial. Often problems of this nature (where there is a widely held common concern, but no simple short term solution due to the structural nature of the underlying causes) lay unsolved and apparently insoluble. Collaborative action research provides a process by which the many interested parties can begin to take the steps necessary to solve the problem.

There are several important aspects involved in this process. As the Zen proverb states 'Every journey begins with a first step'. In the case of difficult structural social problems it often seems to be impossible or meaningless to take the necessary first step. Collaborative action research helps foster the process by which interested parties can take a first step. More importantly, because it is collaborative in nature, and involves the interested parties as beneficiaries, and participants, it effects structural change. It effects this change in a peaceful non-confrontational manner by bringing interested parties together to effect change for the common good.

The collaborative action research is of course on-going. The collaborative team is now publishing a second edition of our 'Handbook for a Conflict Manager Program' (the first edition sold out with copies distributed across

Canada). The television documentary is expected to air nationwide in the Spring of 1997. I and my colleague from Lochside School will be presenting some insights and results at a Professional Development Day covering three cooperating school districts in February. These activities are part of the ongoing collaborative action research cycle.

New questions continue to arise. Most important among them are:

Will the implementation of this conflict manager program as collaborative action research effect enduring structural change in the community?

Will the values and processes of conflict resolution that have been instilled in the elementary school children have a lasting effect as a life skill on their ability to solve conflicts peacefully?

Only time, and more research will reveal the answers.

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